



**AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

**When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

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**Mark Jeftovic:**

Now you can say it. Now you can say something interesting.

**Charles Hugh Smith:**

Okay. Well, my slogan for our salon today is from Hunter S. Thompson.

When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.

**Jesse Hirsh:**

I thought you were going there.

[opening theme]

**Mark Jeftovic:**

Hey, everybody, it is —

**Jesse Hirsh:**

Potential title.

**Mark Jeftovic:**

Potential title.

AxisofEasy 22. Are we on 22? Recording this on September 17th 2020. With Charles Hughes Smith, Jesse Hirsch, and myself, I'm Mark Jeftovic. And we will be putting this up on axisofeasy.com — and what do you guys want to talk about this week?

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Recorded September 17, 2020

<https://axisofeasy.com/podcast/salon-22-when-the-going-gets-weird-the-weird-turn-to-youtube/>



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#### **Charles Hugh Smith:**

Well, go ahead Jesse.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

No, I was just smiling.

#### **Charles Hugh Smith:**

Oh. Um, well, I would love to go back and re-visit a topic that we've touched on in many salons, which is: What is the current version of capitalism that we're inhabiting and participating in? And how is it different from previous versions? Or "better versions" that we imagine?

And my little hook on that is because I think it's a really fertile topic. Because you know, capitalism — the word is used as propaganda. Like: Oh well, you can't disagree with what we're doing because we're all capitalists. And so therefore, if we're winning and you're losing, it's just our meritocracy. That kind of stuff. So that's why it's dangerous to use capitalism as a word, because it's got all these layers of propaganda and self serving justification loaded on top of it.

But the other topic I wanted to kind of introduce was Marx's idea, which was, of course, Hegelian. From Hegel's core philosophy which is: History is not just a jumble, it's not a chaotic jumble of bad things and good things, it's actually on a trajectory, right? It's aiming for some better world, right? And so for Marx, that world was going to be better was when capitalism reached the final crisis of its internal contradictions finally unwound to where it could no longer sustain itself.

And then, we get some better world which he called communism, and which, of course, has a negative connotation because that didn't play out so well in the real world. But let's talk about that teleology, which is part of the title of my new book, which is the idea if you connect the dots of a system, you're going to get to a destination, whether that's the one you planned, or that you like or don't like — it doesn't matter. You connect the dots in a certain way. That's the destination you're going to get to. So to me, that ties into this idea of are we in late stage capitalism, like are we close to the final crisis? Or we're just in another iteration of an endless version of capitalism?

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**Mark Jeftovic:**

I like Winston Churchill's definition of history better. One damn thing after another.

**Charles Hugh Smith::**

I think that was actually Toynbee.

**Mark Jeftovic:**

Now that would make a lot of sense.

**Charles Hugh Smith::**

And I think he was actually saying that it as a straw man, because he was. Then his next point was, it is not just one damn thing after another, but it's easy to take both sides of that.

**Mark Jeftovic:**

Right. Well I've heard it attributed to Churchill, so —

**Charles Hugh Smith::**

Ahh... that's interesting because of course, he wrote huge volumes of history.

**Mark Jeftovic:**

He did. Yes, he did.



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---

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

And as we know, on the internet, you can attribute anything to Einstein by default and pretty much get away with it, but often not always credited because you don't have to. But often, on this podcast, I evoke Marshall McLuhan, or more aptly, I rip off Marshall McLuhan and take something clever that he said, and I just say it because in the culture of McLuhan, you don't actually need to credit the guy.

But he was quite the Hegelian, and in fact very much saw himself as one of the first people — I think to his credit he was — to integrate media theory. To integrate technology. To integrate the contemporary drivers of capitalism as we've known it, into the sort of a Hegelian framework; but McLuhan was also devoutly anti-communist. He was a Catholic convert who went to Catholic mass each morning, because he believed that the end of the world was not. And what he meant — and he was kind of accurate in this regard — was the death of the Western individual. He felt that electronic media, followed by digital media, would subsume the construct of the individual, the notion of the individual into the collective into the board, into the group thing; and this made him paranoid, but because he was still engaged in a broader Hegelian exercise — and he meant it in the Christian sense of evolving to the Godhead. That the ultimate pursuit of the Hegelian — this is the thesis, antithesis, synthesis — is that at some point, you evolved to be worthy of a conversation of God.

And so because McLuhan was so anti-Marxist, he didn't like the thesis, antithesis, synthesis; so he invented the Tetrad which was instead of using these three to describe this notion of Hegelian evolution, he had four. And I've mentioned it previously on this podcast, but again, did not give any credit. And the Tetrad, it often refers to as the rules of media. That each new media, each new technology, one could argue each new idea brings with it four impacts: Enhancement, Obsolescence, Retrieval, and Reversal. That when the internet is invented and enhanced to something and obsolescence something else, it retrieves something, and it reverses something. And this was his way of describing what you evoke Charles, as this kind of progression into the future.

The way in which humanity — whether our thought, whether our technology, whether our science, or whether our economic systems are evolving to become better, to be more efficient. And he really saw it as a media centric process. That media is what makes our perception of reality. And that media and technologies are what made the Industrial Revolution.

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What made capitalism as we know it, I say that as a sequitur, because the thing I've been picking about this week is cults. And I've been thinking about cults, not just because we keep talking about things like influencers and elites and social media and narcissism, but because I've been watching the HBO show The Vow, which is a documentary about — I forget the name of the cult — NXIVM or something like that.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Oh yeah. I know that one.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

Yeah, Keith Raniere was like the cult leader, and he is in jail right now awaiting trial. And it's a fascinating documentary. And it goes back to how last week, we talked about how our whole culture's propaganda. And that sort of led me to think: Well, our whole culture is kind of a cult.

But it's like a multi-level marketing, open source cult franchise, where anyone could join the cult of capital. And as long as you're part of the latest stage surveillance capital, which is all about spying on people in marketing, and data mining your customers and all that sort of stuff, then it's easy to be part of this call.

Again, building off the idea that our whole culture is propaganda, it struck me that the first four letters of culture is cult, and that — maybe there's something to meditate on in terms of the cultish nature of the world that we currently live in.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

When you started down that road on cults for a second, I thought you're about to say we should start one. But —



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---

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

My partner, when she and I were watching this show, that's all she would say. "Oh, I gotta start a cult. I should have been writing a cult. This guy could be running this cult making all this money. Why can't I be – " I was like no, no, no.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

I want somebody with some university level philosophy to take me, and perhaps some people in the viewing audience through, what exactly is meant by the Hegelian dialectical. I mean, we've heard that phrase a million times. I think I sort of know what it means. The thesis, antithesis, synthesis — but why is it significant? And why do people use it? Sometimes, in almost a pejorative sense of it's almost demonic. What does it mean?

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

Yeah. I mean, Charles, I can't address the last part. But do you want to offer yours and then I will offer mine?

#### **Charles Hugh Smith:**

Okay. I will, I'll take a stab at it. And well, it's called the dialectical analysis, or a dialectical process, right? And it's supposed to be one of those universals. Like you can more or less apply it to anything right? And it actually has roots in as I understand it. Now I'm not an expert in Greek philosophy, but as I understand it, it was considered as part of the rhetorical tools that everybody who was educated in Greece learned the dialectical method. And so it's been around for a long time.

And I think, as far as I can say, from what little I know of Western thought, I think Hegel kind of brought again to the foreground. It never really went away. I mean, there's actually Christian dialectics, right? And so, it's an analytic technique. And once Hegel introduced it in the 19th century, then it was picked up by some of the existentialists.

And so for instance, John Paul Sarte's last major work, the Critique de la Raison Dialectique, right? The Critique of Dialectical Reason, where he tried to integrate



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---

Marxism and existentialism essentially. So I think that would be my kind of nutshell description of the dialectic methodology.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

And I would build off that by saying that as a methodology, it's kind of – and I say this in my usual crass way – meant to justify the role of philosophers, right? It's meant to show the value that philosophy and philosophers have, because on the one hand, it is, by definition, critical thinking. You're taking an idea, and then you're opposing that idea. And then the opposition to that idea – the argument, is that you're going to get to a better idea in the synthesis, which then becomes a new thesis, which you should oppose.

So the Marxist describe this in a very oppositional or a very revolutionary context, where you're fighting the state, you're fighting the establishment. That's the thesis. You're the antithesis, and you're trying to get everyone to the synthesis, very simply put, communism. But it's meant to be an iterative process in which you're doing it over and over and over. It's sort of moving logic forward, which again, the philosopher uses to justify their bread, to justify their role because they are advancing society.

And one could argue this is what Silicon Valley does today in terms of constantly iterating and releasing a new version, and going through as quickly as possible. That kind of development cycle. But in the Christian sense – well certainly Hegel – meant this. Well, Marx didn't, it also evokes a religious context of evolving to God. That the process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, is that you're elevating your thought, you're reaching a higher plane. And the higher you get, the more likely you are to be worthy of the Divine. To be worthy of a conversation with the divine, which I don't think it no longer applies in a secular society, but it does speak to abstract thinking that the more levels you can do this, the more abstract your ability, the greater your strength as a philosopher, as a thinker, as a critical thinker.

And so McLuhan, in the same way that Charles was saying that you can apply the dialectical analysis to anything. McLuhan argued that you could apply his model – the Tetradic analysis to anything. To his credit, I think he was coming from the world of ecosystems, coming from the world of environmental awareness of realizing it's not a linear logic, it's a nonlinear logic in terms of how networks were. And that was partly why he focused on the Tetrad as applied to media and technology. Because they are



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---

very dynamic. Because they aren't linear in terms of their cause and effect, but ecosystems create virtual environments in terms of the effects that they foster.

Now, I'll bring this right back to the beginning and briefly ending. All of this is trying to anticipate what happens to capitalism next. Or what happens to the future Or where is this pandemic heading? Or what happens if more and more people opt out, or revolt or reject established authorities, because that is the value of this method? That's why philosophers sort of are able to say: Hey, this is why we have a role in society, because we'll help you prepare by anticipating what's coming next, because we're gonna use this abstract thinking to anticipate the future.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

And i would also like to – briefly if possible, it doesn't have to be brief – because it sort of brought us back to the word teleology, which is things just happening in succession one thing after another, or is it creating this grand arc of history that's leading to a final – the next destination or final destination?

And yes, Charles, you used it in the title of your book. So just briefly we did explain it a little bit, but I did have a mental note to just put some clarification around both those terms.

#### **Charles Hugh Smith:**

Yeah. I thank you for that opportunity, Mark, because it's a word that's based on a Greek word Telos, which is the end. So it's kind of like the end of whatever processor journey you're on is the teleology. And so it's kind of like a goal. It's kind of like the end state. That the system outputs – but those are sort of abstractions. And so the way that I've kind of settled on describing it, it's like you kind of connect the dots of your life, of your experiences of the era that you live in, or a system, or a history.

Whatever you're talking about, you can connect the dots in a way that there is a trajectory, like this leads to this, and this set of circumstances generates this output, and so on. And so, like in capitalism – just to use an example – what everybody senses about the current – i would call it state cartel surveillance capitalism, some kind of mouthful because there's so many important parts we don't want to leave out. But the system that we have generates inequality, unfairness, injustice, and basically gross

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---

distortions of incentives. And that there's no other output possible. And that's the teleology of the system. In other words, it's like you can have free will, but if you have systems that do XYZ, these processes, you're going to end up in a certain place whether you like it or not. And so you want to choose those dots you're going to connect wisely.

And I think that's to Jesse's point, we're talking about: Where is all this going to lead? Well in my view, if you understand the dots that you're connecting, then they're going to take you to a place. And whether anybody doesn't like it or like it, sorry, the systems don't work with whatever you like or don't like. They're going to proceed with the inputs, the processes, and you're going to get an output. And the output is already revealing itself as social disorder, disruption, fragility etc etc.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

One of my favorite quotes of all time is Charlie Mungers' "Show me the incentives and I'll show you the outputs".

And that's, I think, what we just talked about there.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

There's similar line from a critical pedagogy. You get what you test. That education isn't about learning, it's about reverse engineering the tests.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Right.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

So whatever the tests are, that's what you get. Rather than actually fostering some sense of education.



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---

**Charles Hugh Smith:**

Remind me of the author of that. The critical pedagogy.

**Jesse Hirsh:**

Sorry. And the phrase just came back, I truncated. "What you test is what you get."

**Charles Hugh Smith:**

Yeah.

**Jesse Hirsh:**

And if you Google that, it'll come up with quite a bit of literature referencing.

**Mark Jeftovic:**

Who wrote that book?

**Jesse Hirsh:**

Albert Einstein.

Just kidding. I was being sarcastic.

**Mark Jeftovic:**

That reminds me of Goodhart's law, which is: "Once a measure becomes a target, it becomes useless as a measure."



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#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

Which, again, for rolling on this, because I think it's relevant. It's the old: "If you have a hammer, everything's a nail."

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Yeah.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

Right? And all this speaks to how our perception is shaped by the tools we use, and the way we approach the world. Which is why I felt McLuhan's Tetrad was so brilliant, because media and technology does shape our experience of the world.

And he was very much a Hegelian thinker. A footnote to Harold Innis, like he really elaborated on Harold Innis' work. I mentioned previously here on the podcast. And it is argued that with every new technology comes a new empire. That the old empire cannot adapt the new technology, it does not have the logic or the capability. So the opportunities for a new empire to arise as a result of that technology. And that's where I think surveillance capitalism is an interesting concept. And I mean Shoshana Zuboff as an intellectual is what I would call a nostalgic capitalist.

Mark, I said I think you're a little bit of a nostalgic cap, or nostalgic nut for a golden era of capitalism, but you envision a golden era of capitalism. So you are a futurist. And that you're imagining a future world where capitalism works in the way you desire. Versus Shoshana Zuboff is imagining a past world of capitalism that she thinks worked really well, that she wants to return to. And I think the concept of surveillance capitalism does rebut or defy the concept of late stage capitalism, because surveillance capitalism is not late stage capitalism. It is not capitalism and crisis. It is capitalism reinvented. It is capitalism that has harnessed surveillance technology, that has harnessed digital platforms, that has taken the best aspects. And I don't mean fast as immoral. I mean fast as in efficient to the capitalist. The best aspects of Monopoly capital, but without the trappings of Monopoly capital, because it's a much different kind of Monopoly capital.

Let me compromise on that rather than get too deeply into it. And I think that's an interesting debate, as to whether this is late stage capitalism, as many would argue,

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---

or whether capitalism has reinvented itself. And the iteration has not let it towards the Marxist path of this is the end of capitalism; but instead, has created a novel path, a completely new path. And that's where capitalism is headed.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Do you mind, Charles, if I jump in?

#### **Charles Hugh Smith:**

No. Please do. You've been shorted.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

I had one of those "I should have said" moments after last week's edition when I said I can sum up capitalism in one sentence, and you said: No, that's Mark's capitalism, and how you were talking now about my ideal golden age of capitalism. That's nothing I came up with. I mean, that's as old as Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek, and Rothbart. Yeah, I'm just channeling it, but I did by no means architected it.

And I guess a future ideal golden era of capitalism to people like me would be Austrian economic-based anarcho capitalism, which will probably never happen in this universe. But we can always hope. But what we're talking about here about this whole late stage capitalism as everyone is referring to it. And what it's referring into also ties directly into what we talked about a lot, which is the network state and what comes next after the nation state, because this is directly driving the next configuration of power. And I went out and I got that Innis book that you mentioned on that previous episodes – Empire and something.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

Empire and Communication.



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#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Yes. That's the one. I haven't gotten that far into it yet, but surveillance capitalism does tie into our fears about well: What if the network state is Google is Facebook? And it's all just about surveillance and and eventually social credit?

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

Well not eventually. My argument is that it exists presently.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

True. Yeah.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

Right? And that's where I think the Venn diagram that we share in terms of an overlap – I think it's that we are all cautious of these digital monopolies. But at the same time, I think we owe it to ourselves to be while critical, attempt to be neutral as we assess them. And this is where – as much as I dislike them, I will argue, at least presently – that neither Amazon nor Google, and maybe even not even Facebook – who I despise – are authoritarian, right? They're centralized. They're powerful. They're monopolistic, but none of them actually promote authoritarianism outright, at least right now. I could see them doing that in the future.

But let me say one other thing. I also think the Venn diagram where we all overlap, is that I think we're all futurists. And that's where I affectionately describe it as Mark's capitalism. I'm not ascribing you authorship, Mark, with a case. I am suggesting that it's what you advocate. And that makes you a leader. That makes you a thinker, a philosopher. That you have these ideas that you've read that you absorb, that you advocate. And so I think the Venn diagram that we all share is that we're all futurist, because each of us can imagine a future we desire. And each of us use our philosophical capabilities to try to map on course that at least gets us close, at least gets us going in that direction.

That doesn't mean that we share those futures. We might have a completely different future. But the fact that we each employed the methodology of futurism is I think what we have in common, and what we align ourselves, what we see as comrades in the

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---

sense. And that's where I think the extent to which surveillance capitalism, or the extent to which Google, or Facebook, or the network state, is now our empire, Our regime is worthy of exploration, is worthy of us dissecting and understand because as we hypothesize that the nation state is now irrelevant, even if it is still kind of bloated and alive and kicking; because it has been transcended by the network state, which is the manifestation of digital empire. Then I would argue according to Hegelian logic, that there is something new emerging behind the network state, and we should be concerned about that as well. And maybe that is the decentralized democracy that we each desire. Maybe that is a new authoritarianism that we fear. But that's where I kind of feel we got to go back to the dialectic method or the tetradic method, or futurism as a whole, and say: There is no stasis, there is no stopping. If we're describing the network state today, let us also entertain what comes next. What comes tomorrow.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Charles, can I just throw one quick turn in?

I agree with you that good the Google's and the Facebook's and the big tech and Amazon's are not authoritarian dictatorships. And they're not democracies either by any stretch. I think what they are, and what they aspire to be is a technocracy. They're technocrats. And that's not a dirty word to them. It's ideal. And you have modern day, perhaps more mainstream celebrated futurists like Parag Khanna and Jason Panton and people like that who are who are writing these think pieces and promoting technocracy, management of society by experts as the next step of democracy. And I don't see where you would need surveillance capitalism to make that happen.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

Now, let me quickly just push back and say: Futurist is a synonym with philosopher.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Right.



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#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

So while philosophers are a great big bucket that included diverse bunch of people, futurists are a great big bucket that include a diverse set of people. For the record, after I suggested we were futurists, I didn't want to be associated with the people you mentioned. So I just wanted to make sure that it's a very big bucket.

Sorry, Charles, please go right ahead.

#### **Charles Hugh Smith::**

Well I'm going to take a real stab here at trying to tie in things that you each have brought up. And I'm going to start with Jesse's concept from McLuhan that the individual in the western concept of individual has faded or been replaced or has been absorbed; and so, that's a big deal. And I think that surveillance capitalism is definitely part of that empire. And it raises in my mind is the idea that the empire could strike back in two ways.

One is, I've been reading Thomas Merton who was a Christian sort of philosopher, a Catholic convert much like McLuhan I think, who delved into the Eastern religions toward the end of his life. And Kierkegaard, the 19th century Danish philosopher who struggled with his own faith and with the existential things that really kind of launched a lot of what we think of as existentialism in common culture, which is like a sense of dread, a sense that God is dead, etc, etc.

And in other words, individuals struggle in a chaotic world with no more solid foundations of faith that used to underlie conventional culture. So I could see pushback from the part of human nature that actually does one agency. That actually resists joining a cult because it seems to me there's parts of human nature that are completely satisfied and ecstatic to join a cult, because what Erich Fromm called the escape from freedom, right?

In other words, Nazism was a gigantic cult, and it was extremely successful because it basically hit all those human receptors at a very vulnerable point in German history. So the cults work because they activate all these great receptors for belonging to something, for letting go of the dread and anxiety of having choose your own life and be responsible, and so on and so forth. But then there's another part of us that it actually wants agency, right? So there could be pushback against surveillance

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---

capitalism and that imperial digital world from this human nature. But I also wonder if the nation state – and you could call it its dying kick, or you could call it its rebirth. We don't know yet.

But there could be a nation state that decides to destroy private sector surveillance capitalism as a threat. Much like in the Roman history, you could look back and say the pagan religions struck back against Christianity. And there was a couple of emperors there that suppress the Christians and reintroduced the pagan religions. And of course, they lost that grand battle, right? But I wonder if the nation state somewhere in the world might not strike back and attempt one last ditch defense of its own unique monopoly on surveillance and power.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

I was – very briefly, Jesse. I was listening to a podcast the other day, I think it was Doug McKenty, I was on his show a couple months ago. The guy was talking about agorism. The person who coined the phrase agorism and invented it – I have the book right there, and I don't want to jump out of frame to grab it so I can remember his name. I can't remember his name. He wrote this book, I think, back in the 70s. But he was talking a lot about what we talked about, about how the internal contradictions of nation states and the way they're operating and the imbalances of debt super cycles and stuff are going to tear them apart. But he said exactly what you were just talking about Charles, that the empire will strike back. There will be this last gasp.

And I think sometimes, these things that the three of us talk about on this show that we worry about a lot in terms of increasing surveillance – not just capitalist surveillance but state surveillance and social credit getting becoming and becoming more Orwellian and authoritarian. This could all be last gasp of nation state. And we know that centrally planned authoritarianism tends to not survive the long haul.

But what I've been worrying about lately is a last gasp. The empire striking back for a moment in history could actually traverse longer than our and our children's lifespans. I mean, it could be a long time for the people who are caught in the middle of that last gasp, and it can make for a pretty rough couple of generations. And we hear some of the work about long wave cycles, like the fourth turning crowd, and it can take a whole 20 years to play out.

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---

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

I could take 200, but I feel like this the same thing I said last week at around this time. I think you're both using 20th century analogies to try to understand something that is quite novel. And Charles, I think the spirit of your argument was 100% on. That the empire will strike back. And I think the nature of that return volley or that return swing on the pendulum is crucial, but I don't think it's the state taking over the monopoly. I think it could be the state trying to find a way to work with a monopoly. But I think the extent to which the state could operate anything credibly is gone.

Venezuela is the most recent example of this, but I think the extent to which the innovations of by networks in the network state have created such a juxtaposition, such a contrast between what can be done by a nimble organization or a network of organizations compared to the vertically integrated bureaucracy of the state, which is so obsolete it's ludicrous. And yet, because something's obsolete, that doesn't mean it goes away.

Another McLuhan argument was that as soon as something becomes obsolete, it proliferates, because it's no longer of value so it is in abundance. Paper is a great example of this. Cable News is another great example of this totally obsolete and proliferating. There are so many new cable news channels, you go on and on and on.

But I think, Mark, to your point, it could be centuries in which these institutions and structures remain as the empire slowly crumbles. But yet, what is new about the network era that did not exist previously is the ability for different realities to coexist. For people to live in different realities, different empires virtually.

So I think at least you and I, Mark, but arguably all three of us, we've been living in this new empire for quite a while. We've been engaging our professional lives, we've been thinking about ourselves politically and culturally and socially in networks. We're not necessarily tied to a physical geography. I mean, I'm sure Charles prefers to be in Hawaii. I'm sure Mark, there are lots of reasons why you're in West Toronto. And obviously, I'm very happy to be here in the Ottawa Valley. But any of us could be anywhere at any time and still operate our businesses. Still function as professionals because we are already –



## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

My business has no physical location. We have no office.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

Exactly. Right. We are already living in the new regime. And that's partly why I was saying let us anticipate the one coming after that. And let's already start figuring out how we can set up shop there. But again, part of my argument is I think those of us who pay attention – another McLuhan line: “Nothing's inevitable provided you're willing to pay attention.” That those of us who do pay attention, I think we're able to do just fine amidst these changing regimes. It's everyone else that we naturally have compassion for. It's the violence that these types of institutions result in because they're not able to adapt. Because communities are left behind. Because social infrastructure is left to degrade. So there is very real concern to be like: Oh, we got to do something about this.

But that's, again, tragically why I think it could be centuries in which the nation state persists, because the network state will exist anyway. Many of us will just migrate. We'll just go ahead live in the New World while the old world languishes. And that's kind of my relationship to Canada right now. I don't know about you, Mark, but for the most part, I'm living on the internet. That's where my life is. That's where my priorities are.

And that's why I do worry about Amazon and Google and Facebook and the power they have, and how I is a tiny little cockroach. And we're going to deal with these massive octopus – I don't know, they're obviously huge creatures compared to me. But that, I think, is the larger question in why decentralized societies democracy systems are so appealing to us residents of the network state.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

At times, I feel a little bit of guilt about all this. And I'm not in any way meaning to overstate my role in history or anything. I'm another cockroach too. But what happened with me and a bunch of a whole bunch of other little cockroaches as we got on in the very early stages of the commercialization of the Internet and started laying the



**AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

**When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

groundwork for this – and I think by the time we realized we had created a monster, it was a little too late. I don't know if I'm articulating that properly, but –

**Jesse Hirsh:**

I don't think you created a monster. I just think you were in the lab with Dr. Frankenstein.

**Mark Jeftovic:**

Right. And I didn't notice it.

**Jesse Hirsh:**

So you didn't create a monster, you were just hanging out the same spaces.

**Charles Hugh Smith:**

Interesting, interesting. And so I think you have survivor's guilt, Mark. That's what I think.

**Mark Jeftovic:**

Well, cockroaches do right. We can walk around –

**Jesse Hirsh:**

You have a little bit of Stockholm Syndrome.



## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

#### **Charles Hugh Smith:**

Yeah that's right. Well, and of course, if we're mentioning cockroaches, we have to mention Kafka. And I have often written columns where I combine Orwell, and Kafka and Marx. Such a great cast of characters.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

It is.

#### **Charles Hugh Smith:**

And Huxley too, of course. Because you could pretty much define that 20th century of zeitgeist you're talking about Jesse by combining Marx, Kafka, Orwell and Huxley that covers quite a bit of ground.

Well, I just want to throw in something that I I've been wanting to write about more, which is the way that the real world economy is evolving. And we spoke about it last salon with the the auto parts or the store, or that Jesse had various experiences in and of course, the fundamental basis of all – we're still in an industrial age. We call it post industrial, because we've gotten sloppy and lazy, and we've made these grandiose assumptions that there's always going to be lots of cheap energy.

So if the energy gets expensive, or there's not enough of it, then there's going to be some kind of catabolic collapse in the in the real world economy. Now, as long as there's enough power to run the internet, which it's not that big, a lot of people want to expand that and say: Oh, my God, it's going to be too expensive. And it's going to suck the world dry of energy. I think it's around 5% of global electricity, but it could be as little as 3%. And if you cut back on the some of the parameters of that, you could cut down further. So I don't think that's going to be like, we can't have the internet because we don't have any power. I don't think that's going to be the case. But it does mean that the real world is gonna start impacting people's lives, even in the network state.



## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

I mean, I can't obviously argue with the overall premise, but I will offer a personal anecdote to say that it may not be as clear cut. I mean, where I live, the expectation that power will be cut is very high. And when power is cut, you have no sense of when it's going to return. And because I'm on a well, without power, I have no water. And in the winter here, it's so cold that even though you got a fireplace, you still want a little bit of electricity to prevent the place from shutting down. So I have totally reengineered my emergency backup systems and my power outage plans to prioritize the internet. In so far as I have electricity, that electricity goes to the internet, then maybe the water, then maybe some of the other appliances.

I don't think I'm alone in reorienting that kind of logic. That when I think of what I do in an emergency, I want the internet to know what kind of an emergency of it. I want the internet to let me plan how I'm going to deal with that emergency. And that's where we joke about how the internet was invented to survive a nuclear war. But I think the survivalist tendencies that especially this pandemic is nurturing in many people is improving their internet literacy, and is prioritizing how they use the internet in their lives. So I agree that to your subtext, climate volatility, and the climate impending climate crisis is gonna rock the foundation of the industrial – a global economy as we know it.

But I think the internet is gonna be valued above and beyond most things as and when that happens. And even though this may require sacrifices and changes in terms of how people live – and I kind of think the internet's gonna be the remain the fabric by which the network society the network state and the network individual continue to live their lives.

#### **Charles Hugh Smith::**

Mark, take it away.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Oh, you reminded me of a science fiction plotline that I've been pitching to my wife who writes romance mystery novels. A near future scenario where everyone just kind of lives in like little pods plugged into the grid, and they get their nutrients piped in and they live in like a holodeck so they can live whatever kind of life they want inside this

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## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

virtual reality. But the elites of society get to live in the real world, they get to fly on a real learjet and eat real steak. But people in the pods –

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

But –

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Hang on. I gotta tell you the plotline though because all romance stories are the same. It's like the people from the two different classes of society, right? So one of the pod people falls in love with one of the real life people, and then you know, love against all odds. And then at the end – the twist, the person you thought was the real person is in the pod and the pod person was the real person, and roll the credits.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

The ending I do find quite original. Obviously, it's the same trope, but a very original application. But I just want to point out the thing I always point out of this podcast. You just described the paradigm reality as we know it, right? All the people living in condos, having the food delivered to their door, having their groceries delivered to their door, spending their day watching Tiktok, while the elite actually get to go to their cottages, actually get to travel out of the country to places where there aren't lockdowns. In fact, there's a story this week in Canada that a US billionaire was allowed in the Canada for 36 hours and not subject to quarantine, because they're a billionaire.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

I saw that. That was the Uline person, and it was weird because I got a Uline catalog in my PO Box today. And I was talking with Mohammed, the guy who runs the PO Box. He's like yeah, I had 20 of these. Had to put those into your mailboxes and every single one of you just threw it in the recycling bin. And I'm like, it must cost them billions to send these bricks out. This company must be going bankrupt. And then the next thing I saw the 12/36 article, and it's like, really? She flew here on a private jet and bypassed the –

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**AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

**When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

**Jesse Hirsh:**

But to your point, your story is coming true right now. It's just not as evil. But the cultural side is there. Most people are holed up in condos, can't go into the real world. And yet on Instagram, they see all the wealthy and elite and the influencers, living it out in the "real world"

**Mark Jeftovic:**

Well, when I get especially paranoid, when I'm having like those apocalyptic, paranoia episodes, I believe that this is all part of the plan to herd most of society into accepting that kind of reality within two or three generations.

**Jesse Hirsh:**

Versus I think they've already accepted that reality.

**Charles Hugh Smith::**

Okay, let me interject another science fiction plot. I believe it's from the late 50's or early 60's. And it was in the era where Frederik Pohl was writing. And it was a story –

**Jesse Hirsh: =**

He's still – ? I guess he just died. Sorry, go ahead.

**Mark Jeftovic:**

Who was that? Sorry.



## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

Fred Pohl.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Okay.

#### **Charles Hugh Smith:**

Yeah. Famous science fiction author of the early days. Anyways, I don't know if he was the author, but it was in that era where everybody's living in this nice little world, and what they don't seem to realize is when the brick wall's about to fall on them, some creature goes in and protects them, that saves them at the last second; and then they're about to stumble over something that the creature arises. And I believe it might have been pets. Might have been the household pets were actually supernaturally powered beings who saved us at every little thing. And I think that's industrial society in a way.

Jesse, when you start describing the nuts and bolts that are actually trying to compensate even typical rarely for industrial society are just horrendous. And I was just talking to Chris Martens in a podcast and he's got sort of like you, Jesse. He's got a large homestead, and he's gathering a lot of people to do a lot of work and have a community in Eastern US. And he's saying he's got a bunch of people from New York – and not to not to bang on anybody from New York – but his his experience is people don't know how to do anything. They don't know. They've never picked a single item of food from the earth. From a vine. They don't know what sheetrock or drywall is. I mean, they literally know nothing about the real world, because industrial society has been so effective at basically saving us from every little impact, right?

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

I'm one of those people. I'm hopeless. Hopeless.

Go on.



## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

#### **Charles Hugh Smith:**

So if industrial society phrase – which I believe is not going to take 200 years, I think it's more like, in the next five, we're gonna see like shortages of energy that are going to bring John Michael Greer's catabolic collapse to happen. In other words, the energy state is going to collapse off of a cliff and find some footing at a much lower level of complexity and energy consumption. And so the question is kind of like atoms in a covalent system. What happens when the energy level drops? How severe is that?

And so then part of what I think the futurist mentality should be, well, let's kind of think: What are those parameters of those energy drops and complexity drops? And so it can be not so bad, right? Like, you don't get your trash in the city picked up twice a week. It's only once a week, or twice a month. But it could also be like your trash never gets picked up, because guess what? That service is gone. We don't have the money; the crews have abandoned that. They no longer want to do the thing for the pay that we can offer them, etc, etc. The trucks are broken down because of the part. The parts are no longer available in the supply system. There's lots of these things, and I think the more you know about any one part of the industrial supply chain and the complexity that it's built into it, you get more paranoid, Mark.

I've had readers tell me, they're they're in the delivery of gasoline of petrol system. And they're saying hey, three days is gone. The whole thing could easily break down. And then there's none left. Period. There's nothing left in the supply chain. not just in your local petrol station. There's none in the supply chain, and so and then the same is true of food. And the same is true of lots of stuff. And so when that collapse happens, I don't think we're going to get 20 years. And I think that once that disruption happens, then we're going to be exposed to all the fragility in the social and political systems.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

That's what I was very concerned about in January, when this whole thing Coronavirus started breaking. I was very concerned about supply chain breakdown and started stocking up, doing that kind of thing. Jesse, I think you were as well. Now, what the problem could be is because we had what was supposed to look like an existential crisis in March got turned into government stimulus in May, and then that turn that turned into all time stock market highs in August. And people now think: Oh, so this is how we deal with existential crises now. The government's just gonna write a bunch of cheques, the stock market's gonna go up, and everything's gonna be fine. And the



## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

next time, when there's a real existential crisis and what Charles is talking about actually comes to pass, It just reminds me – I'll stop after this, Jesse.

I remember a New Year's Day, I might have told this story already on this podcast, I can't remember. It was like 30 years ago, New Year's Day. All the restaurants are closed. We're walking down College Street in Toronto, just kind of talking. And there are these young hipsters going door to door and looking for breakfast and all the restaurants were closed. And they're kind of like shaking at the door and it's locked. This is the modern-day equivalent of foraging for food, but they couldn't find any. We just went back to the apartment and fried up some eggs and bacon, because we were old fogeys, and we knew the old antiquated skills of how to actually make your own breakfast in your own apartment. But imagine that to the unlimited degree of just everybody saying: Well, where am I going to get my food from? If I press the button on my smartphone and my food doesn't show up? How am I gonna live?

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

I mean, I think you're both being a little alarmist Although I do agree with the general sentiment expressed by both of you. Hopefully, you think of the Russian revolutions as a template since we evoked them last episode or the one before. The spring revolution was a warning, right? That's when the sort of provisional parliament came to power and the Tsar was overthrown and there was a brief thought of oh, we're gonna have a liberal democracy, of course until the October Revolution happens. Technically was in early November, and the Bolsheviks took power in the Russian Civil War half. I kind of feel we're in a similar timeline right now.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

You just sent shivers down my spine, actually.



## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

Well, because it matches our political timeline, right? The spring pandemic was a warning. And we are now headed whether you look at the Spanish flu, or you look at some of the modeling that has been done for this particular pandemic, the fall and the winter is when things are gonna go nuts. I suspect the death rate will be a lot lower because medical organizations have had time to find treatments and therapies and strategies, but we're already seeing a huge uptick in infections. Schools gone back in, and of course, the US presidential elections provides the political chaos.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Well, I think that's a catalyzing event. It may not even be the Coronavirus. It could be the elections.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

I disagree. They're in tandem. They are inseparable. The Coronavirus is global, the presidential election is American even if it has a global impact. But that's not my point. Allow me to get to where I'm going with it.

While I agree that all the frameworks in place for the US to hit the fan, I actually think there's a lot of resilience out there. And I, again, cite my own personal example that the things I know how to do now that I did not know how to do two years ago, that I did not know how to do five years ago, are incredible. I can bake the best bread you'll ever have. I got chickens making eggs, I got goats making milk.

The extent to which my self reliance – I was just in the middle of sweeping my chimney right now, that's why I was a little late for the start of our podcast. As soon as I'm back from sweeping my chimney, I repaired my hot water tank, I maintain and repair all of my vehicles. This is all stuff that like yourself, Mark, I did not do, did not think I could do when I lived in the city. And I don't think I'm alone. I think that there is a growing number of people who are empowered by YouTube are doing everything themselves, are becoming more and more self reliant.

Hopefully, we're not going to get some october surprise that makes it impossible for everyone else to jump on the homesteading or the DIY or the open source bandwagon. But this is why I'm a little cautious optimistic that the catastrophe you guys are

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## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

convinced is coming will not play out as badly as we might think, because of the resilience of the human individual and the human being and the human community and the internet. And the extent to which the internet provides knowledge on demand – and speaking from experience, there's a ton of knowledge for self sufficiency on anything you could imagine that enables a wonderful decentralized society if only people had the reason to look it up.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

The last thing I'll say, I think you are atypical. And you may be part of a rising wave, but I still think that wave is extremely small. But hang on. To your side –

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

I got to rebut. I got to quickly rebut, because when the going gets weird, the weird turn pro. So yes, I'm a weirdo. But I am at the head of the pack.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

When the going gets –

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

And I just I agree that I am pretty far ahead of the curve, but behind me I see a tsunami. And I think that that is where everyone is coming, because they're scared of the scenario you guys are describing. And they're going: I don't want to get caught holding the bag when that storm comes, so I'm going that direction. and that direction is self sufficiency.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

When the going gets weird, the weird go to YouTube.



## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

That's the title right there.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

But the other thing, Charles, I think you know him as well – Dmitry Orlov, I'm friends with him on Facebook, I think you might be as well. His first book was reinventing collapse. What I liked about that book was he talked about the collapse of the Soviet Union and why that society was counter intuitively fairly well prepared to wether the storm of the political disruption that political collapse caused. And then he talks about why Western society like the United States is not. And it's more brittle. Now granted, he wrote that book – I think...I don't know what year he wrote that book. But it was before. I think it was like the internet was becoming big, but it wasn't ubiquitous yet. So to your point, that could be possible.

However, even though globally, there could be energy supplies the way Charles is talking about, I could picture in a collapse situation the grid going down and you can't get YouTube. So whoever does have the foresight to obtain that knowledge before this happens? See, I think that's the key. You have to obtain that knowledge before this happens. You can't be googling: How do I bang two rocks together? after it happens and you've got no power and no rocks.

#### **Charles Hugh Smith::**

Okay, for my final comment, I just want to say that I often refer to YouTube University, because that's really the university model that I think. And that's what I saw and wrote about in 2012, so that's very real and very powerful. And we all use it all the time. I think I want to go back real quickly to mention that I don't think collapses is like from from zero to 100. I think it's like John Michael Greer's concept of catabolic. It's much more likely that there would be a reduction in complexity of what's affordable or doable. And so then, like I said, your trash gets picked up twice a week or twice a month instead of twice a week or something like that. And maybe food runs out more often in the grocery store, but it's not like a complete Zombie collapse, but it's it's a reduction to what's affordable in terms of energy consumption and management, right? And so how many steps there will be and how many spaces there is between it, we don't know.



## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

---

But to this whole point of like how many people are doing it, I think we can go to the Pareto Principle. The vital 4% are moving incoherently, they're going to influence the 64%. And that's the 80/20 rule reduced 20% of 20% and 80% of 80% gets you 4% and 64%. I'm kind of with Mark. I don't see any evidence that we're getting close to the 4%. But maybe we are. And the closer we get to the 4% vital moving coherently, then they're going to have this outside influence on the 64%. And then we're gonna really see a cultural movement.

But so and in terms of the cult, well, I'm in favor of the salon cult by the way. It can be digital, but it needs a home base. That's very attractive. So let's just say Canada.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

This is where again, you guys are bringing out my Groucho Marxism. That I can't join any club that would have me.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Would you join a club where all the all the recruits gave you all their wealth?

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

No. No, because eventually, they're gonna want it back. This is where I cite the great poet Bobby Dylan, and the Drifter's Escape. Or another one, Rambling, Gambling Willie. That once you win all the cards and winning all the pot, get out of town.

And you can't with a cult because they're all around you all the time. Yeah, I would never want to have a cult. It's terrible.

#### **Charles Hugh Smith:**

And now, I'll end with this. If I won any election, I'll follow that dictum of when asked what would I do, my first action in office would be demand a recount. I've always said that I would be resigning if I if I actually won the recount

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## **AxisofEasy Salon #22:**

### **When the going gets weird, the weird turn to YouTube**

Mark Jeftovic, Jesse Hirsh, and Charles Hugh Smith:

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#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

I've always said –

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

It reminds me of Richard Pryor's Brewster's Millions. Vote for none of the above campaign. Sorry, Mark.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

I was only gonna attack on John Michael Greer. His term for the slow catabolic collapse was the long dissent. That was his first book – not his first book. But he applied it to the Roman Empire. Took about three hundred years, I guess, from beginning to the end. He described it quite well in there.

I think we can stop it there. So like us on YouTube, Spotify, Stitcher, Apple iTunes.

#### **Jesse Hirsh:**

And don't forget to insult us in the comments.

#### **Mark Jeftovic:**

Don't forget to insult us in the comments. Actually, the comments were pretty good last week.

So, and send your friends to [axisofeasy.com](https://axisofeasy.com). And we will see you all next week.

**[closing theme]**

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Recorded September 17, 2020

<https://axisofeasy.com/podcast/salon-22-when-the-going-gets-weird-the-weird-turn-to-youtube/>