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[00:00:00] **Nate Hagens:** In response to my recent core myths still being taught in business school video, many people suggested that I do the opposite and critique, for instance, Marxism or progressivism or postmodernism. And I started thinking what would be the opposite of business school beliefs? And I came up with a whole smorgasbord of options, well labels really.

[00:00:28] Then I started to, obviously get concerned because after talking to folks and reading some things, it became apparent that many of these labels no longer have the meanings in our culture. The way they once did, and many of them have become part and parcel of our current culture wars. And I'd be telling people who have an identity, what their identity is, something that we are trying to move beyond, both in the content and demeanor of, this platform, The Great Simplification.

[00:01:01] However, the deeper goal of this podcast and my work is to shine light on reality in so far as it provides clarity for viable choices and responses, in the road ahead of us. So with that as my original goal, I've decided to playfully title this, frankly, the key blind spots of the Walrus Movement.

[00:01:26] and you confer where these blind spots reside, from the context. Yes. The walrus movement has been a vital force in expanding rights, challenging injustices, and confronting environmental damage. But like every large tribe of humans, it carries its own blind spots. And some of these are so baked in, they feel like common sense until you look at them from a wider systems lens.

[00:01:55] The danger is that a worldview can be morally right, but biophysically untenable. We can have our hearts in the right place, but our map of the terrain

will leave out the cliffs and the rivers. so think of these following blind spots as fog on the windshield. Wiping them away doesn't change our destination, but it can make the road ahead clearer, and more navigable and in a century, defined by limits on energy, on materials, on our earth's ecological capacity.

[00:02:33] Clarity on the road ahead. Matters more than ever, which is what this entire platform is about. So, with that said, both with trepidation and resolve, here are a list of myths from the walrus movement.

[00:03:04] number one. and these are in no particular order. Profit is bad. We increasingly hear in the media that profit is abnormal or even immoral, but the drive for surplus isn't an invention of capitalism. It's a biological imperative, as old as life itself. Hundreds of millions of years old in ecology.

[00:03:28] It's called optimal foraging. Every organism from bacteria to bears tries to get the most energy for the least effort. A lion doesn't hunt out of greed. Surplus energy for the lion buys it. Rest, reproduction, resilience. And a lion's life. In that sense, non-human animals were the original investors, and the difference between what they eat and what they spend to get it is in a very fundamental way, profit.

[00:04:02] Humans do the same. Profit is just our proxy for surplus, not just in dollars, but in stored energy, time, and resources. And our current system distorts this idea by ignoring ecological and some social costs. But surplus itself is what makes art, science, compassion, and even environmental stewardship possible.

[00:04:27] If we're constantly scraping to survive, we have little bandwidth for anything else. The related topic is extraction. Extraction works the same way. Life depends on extraction. The roots of plants actively mine the soil exuding sugars to farm the nearby microbes that then release nutrients. Deer graze grass parrotfish will chew living coral to get at the algae leaf cutter ants.

[00:04:56] Strip entire plants of foliage, et cetera. The problem isn't that humans extract, it's that our aggregate extraction has no limits or reciprocity. As our withdrawals are now far exceeding our deposits and therefore breaking nature's feedback loop. But as The Great Simplification looms closer, any livable just futures that arrive are going to still require both extraction and profits, but hopefully more grounded and ecological reality.

[00:05:33] Right now, the revenue side of our profit equation is massively subsidized by non-renewable energy and minerals and the expense side. Doesn't include damage to nature's ecosystems. So a clear view of the future would mean redefining profit beyond financial metrics, pricing it to reflect the biophysical costs, and shifting more human consumption, to be received from regenerative flows.

[00:06:03] But profit at its core isn't the problem. It's how we define and pursue it in our current culture. Next blind spot. The main problem is capitalism. The definition I use for the purpose of this video is that capitalism is a system where the tools land and infrastructure needed to make goods and services are privately owned, and their use is directed towards making a profit.

[00:06:32] So some circles increasingly framed capitalism as the singular villain of our time, but the deeper driver. Is the human operating system, our evolved tendency to seek status surplus and short-term rewards. Capitalism is just the latest cultural software running on that biological hardware. What we're mostly doing without being aware of it when we critique capitalism, is critiquing a dynamic that's way older.

[00:07:04] It first emerged with agriculture, storable, energy surplus and hierarchy in all of these long predated private property or markets. a quote I often, read in my presentations by anthropologists Robert Wright in a short history of progress. Wrote, when Cortez landed in Mexico, he found roads, canals, cities, palaces,

schools, law courts, markets, irrigation, works, kings, priests, temples, peasants, artisans, armies, astronomers, merchants, sports, theater, art, music and books.

[00:07:44] High civilization, differing in detail, but a like in essentials had evolved. Independently on both sides of the earth. This happened way before capitalism. And to paraphrase, independent civilizations on different continents show the same template, energy surplus enabled scale, hierarchy and complexity.

[00:08:05] This wasn't capitalism, but a biophysical dynamic of a social primate in a novel context for us of considerable energy surplus. Once you free up a surplus, be it from farming fossil fuels, or any energy source, large numbers of humans in aggregate respond in predictable ways, expanding populations, building hierarchies, pursuing power and status.

[00:08:34] Extracting evermore from the system. Important to note, it doesn't have to be all the humans that are doing these things. It's part of the humans that are pulling the rest of the population in that direction. And this all aligns with the fourth law of thermodynamics, often referred to as the maximum power principle is that natural systems self-organize to maximize power, which is usable energy per unit time.

[00:09:00] In other words, capitalism is a modern, large scale coordinated human expression of this same dynamic organizing itself to capture and process as much energy and material flow as possible, as fast as possible. followers of this platform know that my work has revolved around the concept of a global economic Superorganism where humans collectively self-organize around growth.

[00:09:27] And in doing so, because in the short term, money is a proxy for resources, we've outsourced our wisdom to the financial markets. And what is ensued is an unseen, un planning organism with a blind hunger. For more energy

materials, which results in an unconstrained global expansion, which we're seeing all around us.

[00:09:51] So with this system's Vantage, capitalism is in service of the Superorganism, not the other way around. Capitalism is just the latest operating system running on our ancient social primate hardware. Swap the software without upgrading the hardware. Our drives for status surplus and wins, and we still get the same inequality, overshoot and crash.

[00:10:16] Yes, most of the critique of capitalism overlaps with the excesses of the carbon pulse. So one key question becomes in post growth societies, some of which are here, some are around the corner, or even before we reach the end of growth, how would we constrain the drive for surplus in any human system markets, states, or ideologies and design hard limits feedbacks.

[00:10:44] And distributed authority. Can we, this is a central question that I keep asking. and I hope all of you listening are asking that question because it's central to our times. The next blind spot of the walrus movement, authoritarianism is a right wing phenomen. I frequently hear that authoritarian danger is something that only comes from the other side.

[00:11:10] MAGA cult strongman regimes and censorious conservatives. But history shows authoritarian tendencies can emerge from any ideology because in times of crisis power centralizes, when systems are under stress, all political stripes tend to tighten, not loosen. Their control. So it becomes less about ideology and more about our tribal thermostat.

[00:11:35] Flipping to survival mode, authoritarianism is like mold. It grows wherever the conditions are, right? Not just in one corner of the house. And those conditions are right. Whenever fear is high, trust is low, and people believe the threat they face is so urgent that it justifies breaking their own rules. In a situation

like that, like now, centralizing power can feel not only acceptable, but also necessary, which is exactly when it is most dangerous.

[00:12:11] There's been research on left wing authoritarianism, showing that people who see themselves as open-minded still display the same levels of dogmatism and intolerance as those they oppose. In practice, this can mean enforcing strict ideological purity, censoring, dissent, policing allies, and demanding conformity in the name of justice or safety, or whatever.

[00:12:37] When identity with a cause becomes strong enough, even well intention groups will support suppressing opposing speech if they believe it protects what they value. At a deeper level, this raises a question about democracy itself. We often hear it as a given, but in a post growth year, we have to ask what systems could maintain legitimacy, fairness, and coordination without the stabilizing fuel, underpinning growth, right or left.

[00:13:11] Any group can slip into authoritarian modes when pressures mount and institutions falter. Resisting that slide means embedding pluralism, dissent, transparency, and distributed authority into our systems. No matter who's in charge. We'll have to stay vigilant, not just against the obvious autocrats, but against the subtle seduction of righteous authoritarianism and purity politics, even when it comes from our side.

[00:13:42] Especially when it comes from our side as we head toward The Great Simplification, authoritarianism policies are probably the default, in my opinion. And the only hope, which is one of the reasons I do this podcast, is some sort of a meta political response. A systems informed transpo political commitment to resisting control from any direction beyond the walrus somehow.

[00:14:10] Next blind spot. A fair society means equal outcomes. Walruses rightly, value, fairness and equality. Extreme inequality fuels poor health, crime and

distrust and history is rife with examples suggesting large wealth gaps, spark unrest, and even collapse. Having said all that, equality of outcome isn't nature's baseline, nor humanities.

[00:14:40] We differ in talents, energy, risk, appetite, and interest. Some of this is cultural, but much is hardwired because it's been adaptive. It's important to point out that for hunter-gatherers, material equality was enforced and obvious excess was punished. Yet status differences always existed. Anthropologists and neuroscientists alike shows status seeking is deeply wired in the human animal.

[00:15:08] It lights up the same reward systems as food and sex, and today those drives play out in wealth, fame, and online likes. Trying to force equal outcomes from unequal inputs can backfire, often requiring top-down rules that stifle fairness, innovation, and trust. History shows Marxist regimes that pursued radical equality on the surface.

[00:15:35] Ended up with entrenched elites and privileged casts like in Maoist China as E.O Wilson put it. Communism. Great idea, wrong species and an important, sub context. if we're really serious about equality, the lens has to be far wider than the billionaire barista gap in the United States. We would have to consider equality between nations.

[00:16:06] Because billions still live in a few dollars a day and many in regions, that will become increasingly uninhabitable as global heating accelerates. While other countries eagerly await football season, we'd have to consider equality between generations. We're spending down earth's natural capital and leaving ecological, energetic, and financial debts for those who come after us.

[00:16:30] And equality between species. We are dismantling the shared home of countless other beings, our ecological aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. I think it's important to point out that the natural world can be destroyed even if wealth

is distributed equally among humans. The better focus, in my opinion, is equality of opportunity, a level playing field, basic needs met and real pathways to thrive.

[00:17:01] The task is to work with our nature and the nature around us, not against it. Building fair systems with strong boundaries, so inequality stays within limits. That sustained trust, stability, and a livable, world next blind spot. It's all big oil's fault. I'll preface the next couple blind spots by saying that whatever these blind spots of the wall movement are, at least they acknowledge climate change as a species level reality for humanity in the biosphere.

[00:17:38] but some climate narratives still miss. Key logic, reality, and context. The walrus movement is full of biophysical illusions. The problem is that fossil fuel companies are run by assholes who misled us, or renewables can keep our civilization expanding forever, et cetera. This leads to illusory movements in the walrus verse where simplistic ideas are used to organize large groups of people.

[00:18:09] With shallow understanding of the issues and these illusory movements will not survive contact with the biophysical future. I've long said, that they will demand coal when their utilities stop. Essentially, all of them will, and one of the most persistent of these illusions. Is the idea that the climate crisis is mainly the fault of a handful of bad corporate actors, and it is tempting to cast fossil fuel companies as cartoon villains, twirling oily mustaches, and yes, they did fund.

[00:18:42] Disinformation and blocked regulation, but fossil energy as viewers of this show know, coal, gas, and oil are the core enablers of the thousandfold growth of the human economy. Over the past five centuries, our physical systems and societal stability were built, maintained, and expanded on the backs of these invisible armies of carbon workers.

[00:19:08] Exxon and Shell and others supplied these energy inputs, but they were meeting our cultural demand for flights and cars and gadgets and strawberries in

the middle of winter. In systems terms. As I've long said, the real culprit is the combination of cheap ancient sunlight, human desire, and economic systems designed for perpetual growth.

[00:19:34] There are a couple other subpoints here. there's an off repeated claim from the IMF that companies like, and shell are bilking societies to the tune of 5 trillion in annual government subsidies. This is really an incipient narrow boundary meme, that it bears repeating how disconnected it is. The vast majority of this imaginary 5 trillion in externalities.

[00:20:00] Our things that are not included in our current prices, the cost of pollution, health, and future climate impacts. These are not checks being written to Exxon. They're costs that society currently collectively chooses to ignore because we want the lights on and goods flowing at super cheap costs. The direct subsidies to oil companies are minuscule compared to how oil and gas subsidizes modern society itself.

[00:20:27] A second sub point is Shell and Exxon and all of the globally publicly traded energy companies are still only 10% of the oil and gas reserves in production in the world. The re the rest is national oil companies like Petrobas and PetroChina, Oz, nft, Saudi Aramco and the like. So if Exxon and Shell are to blame for climate change, these state oil companies are 10 times to blame.

[00:20:57] The real villain, is the fossil powered Superorganism of modern life. Our structures, expectations, systems and lifestyles. The way forward isn't moral purity, but some managed transition that realistically addresses both supply and demand, while, in my opinion, acknowledging what fossil hydrocarbons have enabled and what will be required to replace them.

[00:21:23] A related myth, that renewables can replace fossil fuels, climate. Storyline that we hear a lot, you'll find it in the UN Reports and the IEA and

corporate net zero pledges and activist slogans is we can solve the problem of global heating by simply swapping coal, oil and gas for wind, solar, and batteries, all the while keeping everything else about society the same.

[00:21:52] In this vision, the only real change is the power source, but that's not how energy systems or human systems work. Fossil hydrocarbons are dense, storable and dispatchable. You can truck diesel to a remote farm and run a generator in the dark. Renewables are powerful and. Improving, but they're intermittent.

[00:22:16] They depend on weather and seasons, which means that you either overbuild capacity store huge amounts of energy or change behavior to match the supply. We cannot ship sunlight except at a cost much higher than our current system could bear. Okay, and building out renewables is not dematerialization.

[00:22:40] It's the opposite. Solar panels need high purity, silicon, silver, rare minerals, wind turbines need tons of steel and concrete and rare earth metals. Batteries need lithium, cobalt, copper, nickel, and the like, and all of it was must be mindd and transported and processed. Yes, mostly using fossil fuels and scaling this supply chain has real consequences.

[00:23:09] new mines in ecologically sensitive areas. changing geopolitical dependencies and in many cases, the continuation of the extractive patterns that look a lot like the old colonial ones. Even if we could replace fossil energy one-to-one, we'd still be solving for the wrong variable. Climate change is but one symptom of the larger disease of ecological overshoot.

[00:23:36] Not reindeer or rabbits, but homo sapiens using and polluting more than earth systems can regenerate. So focusing narrowly on swapping carbon while leaving total energy material throughput. Uncapped is a linear reductionist

solution to a complex systems problem. Solar, wind and batteries paired with reduced amounts of natural gas and some oil in the future for stability.

[00:24:04] Could power a civilization, just not this one. Not one. Built on nonstop growth. 24 7 smorgasbord of consumption with global supply chains, delivering anything anywhere, anytime. And a deeper, harder truth that I haven't talked about much is that we can't simply move to a new system while the current one is still running full bore.

[00:24:27] Today's infrastructure habits and expectations are deeply tied to fossil energy. Any large scale shift will be shaped and slowed. By that legacy next blind spot, we can print and borrow our way to equality and prosperity. Modern monetary theory MMT is gaining traction in some policy and activist circles.

[00:24:50] Unfortunately, in its simplest form, it says that a country issuing its own currency can spend as much as it wants on jobs, on climate programs, on healthcare infrastructure, as long as it keeps inflation in check. But in practice, governments already pretty much operate this way. to a large degree creating new money through borrowing and central bank actions, the appeal is obvious.

[00:25:15] If money can be printed into existence, why not direct it and use it to fix big problems? But money isn't magic. Money is a claim on real things. Energy, materials, labor and ecosystem impacts, and those things have limits. You can print dollars, but you can't print copper, diesel, fertile soil or orangutans.

[00:25:39] And when the supply of real resources is fixed or shrinking, adding more money in a country or globally just creates more claims on the same goods. Pushing prices up and the way new money enters the system matters. It typically, at least historically flows first through banks, asset markets, and government contracts.

[00:26:00] A dynamic economist call the cantillon effect those closest to the spigot benefit first before prices rise. The wealthy who own most stocks and real estate and financial instruments. See their net worth balloon while the poor feel the pinch earlier and harder in the form of rising rents. F food and fuel inflation in such a context functions as a regressive tax one that takes a larger percentage from those with the least.

[00:26:30] MMT also reframes taxes, not as the main source of government revenue, but as a way to pull money back out of the economy to control inflation. On paper, the government can create as much as it needs, then tax away the excess in order to stabilize prices. But this creates an odd loop. The state injects money.

[00:26:54] That money disproportionately benefits those at the top, and then taxes try to claw back later. By then, the gains have often been converted into assets that are harder to tax effectively. If taxes are regressive, the poor end up paying twice, first through higher prices, then through the tax itself, even if taxes are progressive, the distributional skew created during money's first circulation remains.

[00:27:23] And then there's the global dimension, not often mentioned by MMT advocates because the United States dollars, the world's reserve currency, American money printing doesn't just affect US markets. It exports inflation to countries that have. their debt denominated in US dollars or they have to buy food, fuel or raw materials in dollars, but they can't simply print more, of their own currency to match.

[00:27:52] In effect, US monetary expansion can erode the real buying power of entire nations. Underneath it all is a physical bottom line nature, not the US Treasury sets the real limits. When Global Energy Supply falters, no amount of

printed dollars can conjure more oil, cobalt, or wheat. It will only bid up the price of what's left.

[00:28:17] MMT is very clever in accounting terms, but clever without boundaries is just a faster path to overshoot. MMT gets the double accounting entries right on the assets and liabilities, but it misses the third and the fourth entries. Energy and materials and ecosystem impact sound fiscal policy has to start from the realities of energy and ecology, not treat them as optional footnotes to a theory next blind spot.

[00:28:50] Reality is whatever we say it is. In many corners of modern academia, especially parts of the social sciences and humanities, it has become trendy to claim there's no such thing as objective reality. Only lived experience reality's framed as a social construct where each person's perspective is equally valid, and truth is thus.

[00:29:17] Just a product of culture and power. This perspective has some value as it reminds us that the things we experience are filtered through our identity, through history and the context of the situation. But it's also a dangerous meme to take too far. The ice on a frozen lake here in Minnesota will start to melt at zero degrees Celsius, whether we believe it will or not.

[00:29:42] The mechanics and safety of driving a car or flying a jet airplane don't care about someone's worldview. And more. CO2 molecules will trap infrared radiation and heat regardless of your political affiliation. A related assumption to this, especially popular in academic and activist spaces, is that while human behavior consists of both nature and nurture, the nurture of human culture can fully override human nature.

[00:30:13] If we just educate people better, give them the right incentives and dismantle certain institutions, humans will become altruistic, cooperative, and

rational. The trouble is we bring evolved hardware to the table, status seeking tribal loyalty, short term bias, fear of outsiders. The, these traits have been survival strategies for millions of years, and hundreds of thousands of years.

[00:30:42] for hominids, they don't vanish because a seminar tells us they should. Culture can shape how these behaviors are expressed, but it rarely erases them. The flaw here and one so important, I continue to point out that our society's head is metaphorically on fire, is. The walrus movement's, overestimation of the malleability of reality.

[00:31:09] Whether it's the physical limits of the planet or the biological limits of our species, we are part of nature and much of our behavior follows the same rules as other animals, other species compete for status, secure resources protect our group. These tribes don't disappear because we wish them away.

[00:31:29] They operate within the same. Physical and ecological laws that govern all life on earth. The task is to work with those limits, not to pretend that they don't exist. Last but not least, human rights are unbounded. We rightly celebrate human rights, education, healthcare, speech, freedom as hard won achievements.

[00:31:58] Wrestled from centuries of struggle, and these ideals are now woven into the moral fabric of modern societies and often feel akin to natural laws. But in reality, they are agreements within and between human tribes, social conventions, forged through history. Not guarantees, from, nature or anywhere else from the universe.

[00:32:23] They have always been contingent on surplus stability and functioning ecosystems. Historically, rights have rarely been universal. most were extended only to in-group and attempts to expand them further met resistance, a quick reality check, other species. Squirrels, elephants, orcas. Have no guaranteed right to food safety or reproduction.

[00:32:52] They survive on what they can secure and defend, and humans ultimately live under the same ecological rules. Even if we've built cultural agreements to soften them. If rights were truly inalienable, extinction would be impossible. Yet, over 99% of all species, including all of our prior human relatives have disappeared from earth.

[00:33:16] Rights exist because we have the surplus to provide them surplus drawn from earth's biophysical systems as that resource base shrinks. So too is the ability to uphold those human rights. Consider the scale. housing needs cement, steel, and land. A protein rich diet needs soil, water, and often cleared forests.

[00:33:43] A baby born today in the United States will consume 3 million pounds of minerals, metals, and fuels in a lifetime, and we had 81 million of them each year globally. Babies. That is, we also add around a hundred million, 3000 pound vehicles, plus swelling numbers of planes and laptops and refrigerators and air conditioners, all drawing from the same finite resource base.

[00:34:12] So promising unlimited versions of these for everyone means more mines, more refineries, more CO2 and more forests gone. At a climate conference I was at, a couple years ago, one presenter, linking population to our climate situation was shouted off the stage, a sign of how taboo the topic of population has become.

[00:34:39] But the math remains both human numbers and our multiplying machines strain the same ecological limits. Rights without boundaries erode the systems that we all depend on, collapsing ultimately the ecological base for future generations, of humans and other life. The blind spot here is assuming that justice is only about expanding entitlements without asking where's the cap?

[00:35:10] In capitalism or in any other system, either future rights will have to be less material in nature or will discover they were never rights to begin with. Native Hawaiians numbering. we are told in the hundreds of thousands before colonization used almost no metals and very few minerals, only sand and lava and what could be sustainably taken from the islands, but from those limits grew the spirit of aloha.

[00:35:38] Rooted in reciprocity with the land and sea. So the path to long-term justice is shifting from, I deserve my share to, we must live within our shared global budget. That may mean defining both floors and ceilings for certain categories of consumption and building systems that share resources without breaching planetary boundaries.

[00:36:01] Rights matter, but so do limits, and I suspect limits may increasingly matter more.

[00:36:11] Oh,

[00:36:17] so this frankly, which I had quite a bit of trepidation in recording, was presented in the spirit of getting to a meta modern perspective on the global problematic, I suspect as usual. some will say I went too far with this, and many others will say, this was too understated. And I suppose the natural request, after this will be for me to turn the tables and do the same sort of blind spots and myths, for conservatives.

[00:36:50] Yeah, but I don't think I'm gonna do that. my main critique there wouldn't be about facts, and, systems as much as values and the narrow boundaries with which worldviews and decisions are made. And that's beyond the scope of this platform. At least for now, I will do a 10 core myths. Of modern civilization, which, are at a higher, level than what I've just done.

[00:37:23] As a scientist and a systems thinker and an educator, my role isn't to dictate values. It's to lay out what the data history and physics, actually tell us about our world. on this platform, we try to describe the patterns, the constraints, and the feedbacks that are part of the modern human ecosystem.

[00:37:45] No matter what values you start with, those values will have to operate within the biophysical limits of the world. We share. I'm not here nor will I ever be here to prescribe an ideology. I'm here to illuminate the operating conditions of the 21st century so that you viewers and the in turn, the people you influence can make informed decisions on how to create a future for complex life that's better than the default.

[00:38:14] We face much more to come. thank you.