



Episode 922: How to Make Hilarious Libertarian Arguments in Three Minutes

Guest: Seamus Coughlin

WOODS: I just spent the morning watching your videos, and I would watch one, and then I would say, All right, just one more, just one more. And then there's another one that's great, another one that's great. I loved the one where you had Julie Borowski doing one of the voices. It was "Leftism: Then and Now." Just how much it's changed from 2008 to 2016 was so amazing.

COUGHLIN: Oh, I know.

WOODS: Things that we feared might happen eight years ago, they said, Oh, we would never do that. And then they're more than doing it eight years later. So well done.

COUGHLIN: Thank you.

WOODS: There are so many videos that I loved and that I want to talk about. How many of them have you made, first of all? Have you kept count?

COUGHLIN: Oh, that's an interesting question. First of all, I'd like to thank you for such kind words and for enjoying the videos. I think I have about 50 videos that are public right now on YouTube for the Freedom Toons channel specifically. So somewhere in that ballpark.

WOODS: Okay, well, they are absolutely hilarious.

COUGHLIN: Oh, you're too kind.

WOODS: The one you did with the strawmen debating each other –

COUGHLIN: Oh, thank you.

WOODS: I was actually – it's very hard to get me to laugh out loud. People who listen to the show know there are a couple people on this show who can make me do it, but it's very – you know, I laugh politely, but for me to involuntarily, spontaneously laugh, you've got to be really darn good. And I was laughing hard by the end of that thing.

COUGHLIN: Thank you. Oh, you're flattering me. I appreciate that. There will be more of those, by the way. Many more debates with strawmen.

WOODS: Oh, it was such a brilliant idea, and you've actually drawn two figures actually literally made out of straw. So great. All right, of course I want to get into some specific videos that you've done, but how'd you get into this?

COUGHLIN: Oh, that's a good question. So when I was about 18 years old, I had just finished up high school, and throughout my high school career I had been freelancing a little bit within the animation scene in the Chicagoland area. And so I had a teacher who sort of pushed me to start my own small business while I attended community college, and I stumbled across a friend and client – who's now a friend, I should say – and they asked me to produce some animated videos for their conservative news aggregate website. They were called TCS News, and unfortunately, they no longer exist. But I ended up producing a few animated shorts for them on the liberal media, which I've recently rebooted on my YouTube channel. It's called *The Echo Chamber with Dr. Mac*. And I produced for them for a little while, and, long story short, they ended up merging their website with a fellow from Fox News named Kevin Jackson.

And I was working with all of them for a little while, but I kind of wanted to walk away from it, because I figured I was still young enough where I had the leverage to produce my own work without somebody else writing it or influencing my ability to create or limiting my creative freedom. So I just started putting videos on YouTube whenever I had the time to make one, and it evolved into what it is today.

WOODS: Am I allowed to tell people your age?

COUGHLIN: Oh yeah, that's fine with me.

WOODS: Okay, so you're 22 years old, and yet you're making videos that I as a guy who is literally twice your age think are highly valuable, because they're funny, they're well done, but also, the points they make are absolutely spot on. And you've covered all kinds of topics and, frankly, some controversial topics. Which is the one that's gotten you the most views?

COUGHLIN: That's a good question. I think the video that has the most views presently is the one I did with Julie Borowski, "Leftism: Then vs. Now." I believe that one's just shy of 300,000 views.

WOODS: So give an example of something – because some people might wonder what exactly really could have changed from 2008 to 2016, give an example from that video so people know what you're talking about.

COUGHLIN: Yeah, so there's a number of examples. I think one in particular that is an observation I sort of came up with on my own – and a lot of them are, but I think I may have been the first person to point this out specifically, is that back in 2008, 2007, somewhere in that ballpark, there were a lot of conservative types saying the gay agenda is so out of control – as they called it – soon just being heterosexual will be considered homophobic. And of course that was met with, "You're crazy"; it was met with scoffs. And I was actually in the camp of "that's a little ridiculous; you're obviously exaggerating." Now today in 2016, there are people within the trans rights community saying that, as a man, if you will not engage in sexual relations with a

transgendered woman – in other words, a man who believes they're a woman – then you're a bigot.

WOODS: And then on a, let's say, less extreme level, there was the whole thing about, Look, I'm all for gay marriage if that's what people want, but I don't like the idea that a baker should have to bake a cake or a photographer would have to take pictures if that's against their views. And the person said, Oh, come on, that'll never happen.

COUGHLIN: Yep, yep, "That will never happen." And it's funny, because obviously people who are more left-leaning wrote in the comments that I was strawmanning them, but every single one of the arguments I used in that video is an argument I've heard somewhere; I just connected them because I noticed the contradictions there, and a lot of people do. And I remember when I was in high school, doing a research project on this for the debate club, about gay marriage, and I remember sort of being of the thought pattern that it's not hurting anyone even though I disagree with it; let them do it. But I stumbled across the argument that they might be able to force Christian bakers or photographers to involve themselves in their wedding, and I came across five or six articles from people on the left saying that's never going to happen, it's just a conservative boogeyman, no one's ever going to be forced to participate in a wedding ceremony they don't want to be a part of. And then today it's: you're a bigot if you don't want to participate in a wedding ceremony.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, exactly, like what they said eight years ago never happened.

COUGHLIN: Exactly.

WOODS: Exactly the opposite. So you've done that. Then you have – maybe there's more than one, but I saw one you did on feminism where your character was arguing that I could make an equally compelling case that there's sexism against men.

COUGHLIN: Yes.

WOODS: And – [laughing] Let me hear – And it actually sound to me, looking at the different statistics that you had, like you had maybe borrowed some of this from the men's rights movement material.

COUGHLIN: Yeah, so a little bit of the material was from the men's rights movement. Of course, I don't consider myself to be a men's rights activist by any stretch, but I will say there are a number of arguments they make about men making up about 93% of workplace fatalities, losing their children in courts, getting longer sentences than women for the same crimes.

And one thing I've noticed is that there's a double standard of evidence when it comes to the third-wave feminist theory, and it is as follows: if a woman offers up some evidence of her having to experience certain difficulties in life, the feminist movement says that's proof that she's a member of an oppressed class. When a man offers up the same level of difficulty or an even harsher difficulty, we're told to believe that that's just a product of the same patriarchal structures that give him privilege, which is totally ridiculous.

And so I thought it would be funny to display how ridiculous that logic is, to flip it on its head and do the reverse. Well, we could do the same circular theory about men being oppressed: offer up all the difficulties that men face as evidence and then tell women whenever they experience anything like the wage gap, for example, that that's just the system of oppression that benefits them backfiring.

WOODS: I see you have a video – this one I did not get to – on Jordan Peterson. Only 2 minutes, 21 seconds. Tell me what I'm going to find in that.

COUGHLIN: Hopefully a good, hearty laugh. My impression of Jordan Peterson – first and foremost, he's a man I greatly, tremendously admire, and I think I did a good job satirizing him a bit while also making it clear that I certainly support him above the neoprogressive leftists trying to destroy him.

WOODS: And just to make clear, he's been on the show a couple of times, but maybe not everybody knows who he is. He's at I think the University of Toronto and he used to be at Harvard. He's a professor of psychology, and he's gotten into trouble because he won't use genderless pronouns. Or it's not genderless. I guess it's particular – you get to pick your pronouns – who even the heck knows?

COUGHLIN: The new genders. There are many of them. Roughly 57, I believe.

WOODS: Yeah, and I remember on the show he said it seems like some of these genders, I don't think they have any actual members. Like, I think – they're only theoretical. I don't think there are any people in some of these groupings. But anyway, he's been put upon. I personally think he has become more self-consciously ideological, because he was not known and I don't think he would describe himself as a conservative, but I think in light of what's happened to him, he's certainly become a firebrand about what's happening at universities, and he was not that way before. So that's great that you – Has he seen it?

COUGHLIN: Yes, he actually shared it, so the guy has a good sense of humor about himself.

WOODS: Oh, that's great. And my gosh, 169,000 views. That is fantastic. Now, I notice that the view numbers, it must be annoying to you – like I send out a lot of emails as doing email marketing, and I do my best with good subject lines, but I kind of hope that if I keep on always delivering – Like yesterday – or as a matter of fact, just today, I delivered this great email about this temporary assistant professor at the University of Hawaii who was arguing that white people should pretty much just step down from their positions in different departments. And so then of course – and the way math is taught is racist.

COUGHLIN: [laughing] Of course.

WOODS: And then I saw her on a blog. She was given a guest blog post to talk about her PhD dissertation, which she did. And somebody went to the trouble of actually reading it. If you had a PhD and you'd written a dissertation, wouldn't you be dancing a jig if somebody took the time to actually read it. So somebody read it and said, "I like

it very much. Here are a few of my questions that I would have for you." And she responded by saying that – I'm not kidding – you're a man, I'm a woman, and I believe it is oppressive for you to be asking me these questions. I am not kidding.

So I sent that out to my email list, and even though I can't always think of the best subject lines, I kind of hope that by now I have a good enough track record with my people that what matters is not the subject line but the "from" line. If it's from Tom Woods, you'll say, You know, this guy, he's batting at least 85%, so I'm going to go ahead and open this thing. So I bet you would feel like after a while, I produce such good videos; who cares if my title isn't the snappiest? You've got to just click. It's only going to take a couple minutes of your time. And yet the view numbers are so variable. Does that drive you crazy?

COUGHLIN: A little bit. So I think part of it is that you never want to feel entitled to the views, because then you sort of begin to lose appreciation for the fans. So I'm happy that I'm getting any numbers on the videos, frankly –

WOODS: Of course.

COUGHLIN: – because when I started out, I was getting none. And of course I'm not accusing you, by the way, of feeling entitled to views. It's just an issue of knowing that some things are going to blow up with the right audience and some things aren't. I know that what I try to do is release a video every two weeks, and so sometimes what happens is, when you're trying to produce content regularly, you're not always going to be on your A game.

WOODS: No, that's right. That's very, very hard. But for me, you're right. It's not so much a matter of taking for granted that of course everybody's going to want to open my email; it's what one of these things where I feel like maybe you don't know you want to read this till after you've read it.

COUGHLIN: Yes.

WOODS: And like with your videos, you know people are going to love them if they just click "play," and you that after the fact they'll say, I'm glad I clicked "play." So just click "play" already, will you?

COUGHLIN: Yeah. I think part of it is that I used to get really discouraged when I would release a video that would get a lot of views and then the next video after it wouldn't get as many, but then I realized over time that every now and then you're going to sort of hit your stride and get a bunch of views on a particular video, and then it's going to drive a number of donations to your Patreon and you're going to get a bunch of new subscribers. So I don't let it bother me as much anymore.

I guess the best example is I think last summer or two summers ago, I made a video poking fun at Planned Parenthood. And it got about 50,000 views. Now it's up to almost 200,000 views, but it was my most viewed video at the time. And then next video I released after that got maybe 1,000 or 2,000 views. And so I was very discouraged and I thought, I'm never going to get back to that point where I can pull in

that level of viewership. But then later on I released a few other videos that really resonated with a particular niche audience, and then they drove traffic to my channel and subscribed, and so I guess I've realize that over time it's just going to fluctuate. But the beautiful thing about YouTube is you have returning subscribers, so even if they're not always going to watch every single one of your videos, there's some percentage of people that can be counted on to watch them, and that's only going to increase as time goes on, hopefully.

So I guess I try to look at the glass half full. And that was a particularly windy response for that phrase, but that's really all I should have said, is I kind of like to look at the glass half full in that respect in terms of the views I'm getting.

WOODS: [music plays] Well, I've got – what you're hearing in the background is I have your YouTube channel right up here on my computer because I want to run through some of the titles, and as I was trying to scroll through, I think I accidentally clicked on one. So you got an extra view for nothing.

COUGHLIN: Nice!

WOODS: Yeah. But I notice that they're not – the longest one is barely over four minutes. They tend to be between two and three. And that's perfect. That's perfect. I mean, a lot of – my video that I did, obviously not animated, called "Interview With a Zombie" from 2010, I did that – you should watch this when we're done, InterviewWithaZombie.com. I actually even bought the domain name; it redirects to the video.

But I had my friend Bob Murphy dress up as a zombie, and the idea was this zombie is the host of a television talk show. And the idea is that he invites authors onto the show and talks about their books. But we decided that he could say only one word at a time. So he would hold up the book and say, "Boooooook." And then I would talk about the book. But then instead of addressing my arguments, he would say, "Raaaacism."

COUGHLIN: [laughing] I love that.

WOODS: And then I'd say, "Well, it's not really..." And then he'd say, "Neoconfederate," and all these left-wing buzzwords. And so the point of the video should be obvious, that this is how a zombie would interview me, but that also this is pretty much how a mainstream media figure would interview me.

COUGHLIN: [laughing] Yes.

WOODS: So it was a way of getting at them before they could get at me. But the problem with the video is it's just under eight minutes. It's too long. It goes on too long. But it was because at the time, I felt like, But I've got to get all my arguments in. I still was a newbie. I didn't realize that if you want to get more arguments in, put a link in the description of the video to an article or something.

COUGHLIN: Absolutely.

WOODS: Keep the video to the length that you're keeping them to. That's very smart.

COUGHLIN: Absolutely. I appreciate that. Part of it is just an economic issue. I mean, animation is so time consuming to produce —

WOODS: Oh, and that's true too, yeah.

COUGHLIN: But I should also mention that, of course, there's always this understanding that if your video's too long, you're going to lose people's interest. And so I've always tried to create videos that were under three minutes. Every now and then I'll get one that's a little over the three-minute range, though I really try to push myself not to, which is difficult for me because I'm a wordy fellow. And one thing I've noticed is that sometimes the only way you can compress your argument into a short format like that is to oversimplify certain things. And it's unfortunate, but it's just a necessity. And so I like to think that I'm making the arguments as clearly and fairly and honestly as I possibly can within that two or three minutes, but my hope is that after watching the video, people will possibly consider a perspective they hadn't thought of before, and then they'll read more about it. If they just see my video and shape their opinion based around that solely, I would be a little bit depressed.

WOODS: Yeah, fair enough. Now, I'm going to go over to your Patreon page. And I first want to ask you, I just had a guy a couple days ago named Sargon of Akkad —

COUGHLIN: Oh, he's great.

WOODS: Yeah, and he was telling me about the — I knew about it already, but I didn't know how widespread it was — the problem with the sudden YouTube demonetization. Did you suffer from that?

COUGHLIN: Oh, yeah. So technically YouTube doesn't want you posting too much about these figures, but last month I had the best month I've ever had on the website. And I gained about 1 million views and 20,000 subscribers, and YouTube gave me \$100 for that.

WOODS: Oh, man, yeah.

COUGHLIN: Yeah.

WOODS: Yeah, that's not good.

COUGHLIN: Exactly. So it's funny because the two groups that are really being hurt by YouTube's new advertising model are animators and political commentators and I do both [laughing]. So I rely very heavily on Patreon.

WOODS: Ah, okay, well, listen. I really, really like what you're doing, and I think it's helpful and funny, and it's exactly what we need more of, because it can appeal to the person who really doesn't have a dog in these hunts necessarily but who's hearing a lot of loud mouths take one position, and to see a lighthearted poking fun at that position allows that person a liberty to be able to make up his own mind in peace and not feel

like I'm going to be shunned by society, you know? Now I feel a little bit supported in my skepticism of this conventional wisdom. So let's see.

The thing is, I was going to go — this is going to sound totally over the top here, but I genuinely like the goodies that you give away on your Patreon page. So we're on Patreon.com. What I'll do is I'm going to put your Patreon link. Patreon, by the way, for people who don't know, is a platform that a lot of content producers use to generate funds for their projects, and then in exchange, they sometimes will give donors access to special goodies and so on and so forth. And I like the goodies on here. So for a little while at least, I'm going to join you at the \$100 per month level.

COUGHLIN: Oh, thank you.

WOODS: Why not?

COUGHLIN: That's very generous. Thank you so much.

WOODS: But you're doing great stuff, and I mean, what am I — we talk all the time, libertarians, Oh, well, if somebody's doing something worthwhile, why, people will donate to it. And then none of them do, you know? So I kind of want to show that no, people would. So I'm going to do that.

COUGHLIN: Thank you so much.

WOODS: I've just clicked on it. And I've never used Patreon before, actually. This is the very first time I've ever used it, so apparently I have to sign up for the whole thing, so obviously I won't do that with everybody sitting here on the air. But so tell me, in addition to doing this, you also do client work/

COUGHLIN: Oh yeah, absolutely. So I'm a full-time student. I also do client work. I have a —

WOODS: Hold on, hold on a minute. You're a full-time student?

COUGHLIN: Yes, full-time student, I do client work, and I run the YouTube channel.

WOODS: What are you studying?

COUGHLIN: Animation production.

WOODS: Well, okay, at least it makes sense, right. If you said sociology, I was going to punch you in the face.

COUGHLIN: [laughing] Reach right through the computer. Actually, gender studies, so —

WOODS: [laughing] There you go. At least you'll know what they're talking about.

COUGHLIN: Exactly, I know —

WOODS: Actually, the more you study –

COUGHLIN: I'll never know what they're talking about [laughing].

WOODS: Yeah, exactly, the more you study, the less you know what they're talking about.

COUGHLIN: Yeah, exactly. No, I mean, I'm at an art school, so basically just as good.

WOODS: Oh sure, yeah.

COUGHLIN: I'm just as employable as a gender studies major and my professors have similar political attitudes. Some of them, I should say. I have a lot of really cool professors, to be honest.

WOODS: But do you feel like some of your fellow students are people you'd better shut up around?

COUGHLIN: I never feel the need to shut up, Tom.

WOODS: Oh wow, that is great to hear.

COUGHLIN: So I should feel the need to shut up. Now, whether or not I should feel the need to shut up is a different question. I'm just the kind of person who's a bit too proud to step down from a good argument when it presents itself, and so I do end up debating other students, but not quite as often as I had anticipated when I decided to go away to art school. I had figured there would be far more outspoken neoprogressive lefties here, and fortunately, there aren't. You know, there's the general attitude that floats around, and I think people are afraid to say certain things that might challenge that orthodoxy, but when you get people behind closed doors, professors included, you'll hear some pretty conservative stuff that they wouldn't say unless they were feeling vulnerable with you.

WOODS: Huh, okay, fair enough. Seamus, let's take just a minute to thank our sponsor.

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One last thing.

COUGHLIN: Sure.

WOODS: When did you – you talked about how you got started in this, but when did you become a libertarian? How long did that process take? And was there a light bulb that went on or was it something gradual or what?

COUGHLIN: That's a good question. I would say it was a little bit more gradual. When I was in high school, I was very involved in politics, because I actually had been since probably middle school, possibly even elementary school. My parents introduced me to

some of these issues very early on. And I came from a Catholic family. I still practice the faith. And we were more conservative.

And so I remember going off to high school. It was my final year or the year before my final year, I believe. It was the 2012 election. And this stoner in my Spanish class was always talking about this guy named Ron Paul. And so I decided to look into this fellow, and he made a lot more sense than I had anticipated he would. And so I started absorbing more of his arguments, and I was involved in our school's election night coverage, because we had a cable access station where we were required to cover certain community events, including major events like elections. And I represented the Republican side the year that Romney ran, and I was making some arguments that I maybe didn't feel were consistent because I wanted smaller government and I knew the Republican Party wasn't actually working towards that.

So at the end of the night after Romney had lost the election and after I was completely exhausted from all the mental gymnastics it took to support his position, I decided, you know what? I'm done. I don't want to vote for the lesser of two evils if I don't have to. If somebody like Ron Paul were in this election at least as a Republican, I would be honored to give him my vote. And I knew at that moment that it would probably be more ideologically consistent to refer to myself as a libertarian as opposed to a Republican.

WOODS: So once you got out of school, then, given that you have had some success with libertarian videos and you are a libertarian in large part thanks to Ron Paul, what do you imagine yourself doing with your animation? Do you want to do more of this or do you want to just work for clients or what?

COUGHLIN: Oh, no, I want to do a whole lot more of this. I use client work to sort of pay the rent when I need to, and also, there are some clients that I genuinely enjoy working with and would continue the relationship with even if I was in a position where I didn't need to. FEE is an example of this. But my dream is to end up in a place where I'm able to produce my own animated content leaning politically without needing to seek out clients. That's sort of my dream in all this.

WOODS: Yeah, and man, wouldn't that be a glorious thing to achieve? Yeah, man, what a life you'd have.

COUGHLIN: Yes, sir.

WOODS: All right, well, listen, what is the — do you have a website? You have a YouTube channel. What else have you got? Are you on social media?

COUGHLIN: Yes, I'm on Facebook, so [Facebook.com/FreedomToons](https://www.facebook.com/FreedomToons). I also have the YouTube channel; just look up Freedom Toons on YouTube. You can check out the Patreon page, [Patron.com/FreedomToons](https://www.patreon.com/FreedomToons). I'm also on Twitter. That's just @seamuscoughlin; it's just my name.

WOODS: Okay.

COUGHLIN: I have a website, but it's FreedomToon.net and it's not public yet.

WOODS: Okay, all right, so we'll put everything – I'll put what you do have available at TomWoods.com/922. And maybe I'll put one or two videos – I'll put the Julie Borowski video up, and I'm going to put that strawman video up, which I think deserve more views.

COUGHLIN: Yeah, thank you. Put as many up as you want.

WOODS: They're really funny. It's going to make you want to click through to the channel and watch more. Well, congratulations. I mean, really, I don't know how you're balancing everything you're balancing. I hope you're not going to have a nervous breakdown.

COUGHLIN: Oh, we're already past that point.

WOODS: [laughing] Okay, way too late, okay. Well, anyway, it's really tremendous what you're doing. And plus, I love talking to somebody who has a talent that I just don't have. There's no way I could do what you're doing, and that's what makes you great.

COUGHLIN: I appreciate that.

WOODS: Because I bet there are probably a lot of libertarian podcast out there, but there aren't a lot of libertarian animators, and we need people like you doing what you're doing, and I'm glad you're doing it. Thanks a lot.

COUGHLIN: Thank you, and I also want to say that it's really something I love doing, and as I mentioned, I hope to be able to do this full time. And donations like yours really do help bring me one step closer, so thank you so much and thank you for having me on the show.

WOODS: My pleasure.