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# The Closing of the Modern Mind | Tim Keller & Jonathan Haidt

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**The Veritas Forum**

This program was recorded at a Veritas Forum event at NYU in 2017. The original title was "The Closing of the Modern Mind" and featured Tim Keller, Pastor, and Jonathan Haidt, NYU Professor. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate, review, and subscribe. And, if you're interested in more content from Veritas, check out our Beyond the Forum podcast. Visit veritas.org to learn more about the mission of the Veritas Forum and find more resources to explore the ideas that shape our lives.

## Transcript

This is the Veritas Forum podcast, a place for generous dialogue about the ideas that shape our lives. John Haidt in his book talks about the righteous mind, in his righteous mind book, he talks about the righteous mind. At one point, he actually says, he believes that human beings are programmed not just to be righteous, but to be self-righteous.

There is no doubt in my mind that is the main problem. This is your host, Carly Regal. Today I'm sharing with you a fantastic conversation at a Veritas Forum event at New York University.

We originally ran this conversation on our podcast all the way back in 2017, and it's so good we're sharing it again. The speakers you will hear from are Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church and Jonathan Haidt of NYU, as they discuss the closing of the modern mind. You can learn more about the Veritas Forum and talks like these by visiting veritaas.org. I hope you enjoy their conversation.

So this is a true honor and a privilege for me to be here. Some of my students who are here today know, as an instructor, I like to sometimes share my reasoning behind different decisions I make in the classroom and why I decide to do things. So I'm going to share a little bit of that with you now.

So when I was asked to do this, I've decided that I want to do more things that both

excite me and scare me. So that's why I'm here right now. I'm going to briefly introduce both Timothy Keller and Jonathan Haidt, and then they will give their opening remarks in that order.

Tim Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church here in New York City, the author of several New York Times Best-Selling Books, including The Reason for God, Belief in an Age of Skepticism, The Prodigal God, Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith, and Making Sense of God and Invitation to the Skeptical. He is a pastor, theologian, and a Christian apologist who does what many may have thought impossible, namely he appeals to skeptical Manhattan intellectuals. Redeemer Presbyterian Church is now regularly attended by nearly 5,000 people and is one of the most vital congregations in the city.

Professor Jonathan Haidt is professor of Eskel Leadership, as we heard, here at New York University Stern School of Business, and his research focuses on the psychology of morality and moral emotions. Dr. Haidt is the author of two books, Including The Happiness Hypothesis, Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom, and The New York Times Best-Seller of the Righteous Mind, Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion. He was named one of the top global thinkers by Foreign Policy Magazine and one of the top world thinkers by Prospect Magazine.

His 2015 article in The Atlantic Monthly called The Coddling of the American Mind, co-written by Greg Lucianoff, sparked an important dialogue about the dangers of censorship in the classroom and the need for reasoned, open dialogue, debate, and disagreement in the university. Let's hear from both of them. [APPLAUSE] Thanks.

I'm also looking forward to the dialogue, and so I'll try to be brief, even though everything I say usually takes 30 minutes. It's force of habit, but I'll try not to. The real question is how do you have a pluralistic society? How do we live together when we have no common moral framework when we have so many different kind of moral frameworks? Let me say first of all, how do we have a pluralistic society? I think we ought to start by pointing out, before I say, here's where I think we ought to go, here's how I think we can get there.

We ought to start by saying, I'm not sure we ever have had a pluralistic society. I could be wrong, but I think on this one, I think Jonathan Hite will probably agree or be largely sympathetic. Here's an arguable history of the country.

For many years, I would say Protestant, mainline denominations like the Episcopalian Church and the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church, essentially dominated. It's their moral framework dominated the culture. That moral framework essentially said, if you're Protestant, you're okay, if you're Catholic, you're Jewish, you're kind of okay, but a little strange.

If you're an atheist, or a secular person, or a gay person, you're beyond the pale. When Protestantism, the mainline churches, started to go down in the 60s and 70s, there was a period in which white evangelical churches, the moral majority in particular, thought they could step into the breach and take over, and it would then be the cultural elite. And its moral framework would be the framework of the country.

But it was an alarming experience for most of the country because the white evangelicals did not show, the moral majority did not show much more willingness to create a perspective diverse, truly pluralistic, society in which people with deeply different moral visions could get along. There was no indication that if they did become the power elite, that that would have happened. Their attitude, again, toured people with non-traditional morality, people who had a, people with different religions, they showed almost no interest in that sort of thing.

But in the last 10 years, I guess you could say, the secular cultural left has become considerably more powerful, and in my estimation, they are acting exactly like a Christian. And they are acting exactly the way cultural elites have acted in the past, and that is, we have a new set of orthodoxies, a new set of heresies. And we still, I mean, I've had people say to me in, actually, pretty accomplished people have said to me that a person with my particular view of morality in the future will not be able to get a government job, or at least they hope not, that any institution that has my particular view of morality would not be able to get accreditation to grant degrees and so forth.

And so it does look to me like we actually have never had, and we don't seem to be about to have, what I'll call a truly pluralistic, perspective diverse society in which people with deeply different moral visions can speak respectfully to each other, believe and practice and express their particular understanding of things without being ostracized and marginalized, talk together respectfully. I'm not sure we've ever had it, and it doesn't look like we're on the way toward it at all. Miraslav Volf in his great book, Exclusion and Embrace, says that there's four ways to exclude rather than open to somebody who's different than you.

Four ways to exclude them rather than be open to them. And he says the four ways are elimination, domination, assimilation, and abandonment. In elimination you actually push the person out of your space, or you just get them out of here.

I don't want you here. The second domination is to say you can be in my space as long as you take an inferior position. You don't live in the same neighborhoods, you don't have the same jobs.

You can be here, but you have to have an inferior spot. Assimilation is we'll accept you as long as you completely agree with us on everything important to us as we define it. And abandonment is I don't care about you, you may have needs, but I don't care.

And those are all ways of pushing people out. The fact is that every cultural elite I know that we've had so far, including the ones that right now they're struggling, they're struggling, cultural elites are struggling for who's in charge, every one of them still looks like we're going to say we want one moral framework to reign, anyone who does not fit into that moral framework, we want you silenced. And that's the way it's always been, and that seems to be the way it's going to be, but I believe that Professor Heit and I are here to say we would really like to have a pluralistic society, a truly pluralistic society.

How could we go there? Let me give you four things I think might happen. And this is something I think the whole society has to do together, so I'll explain, because I'm a Christian minister and I was actually asked to talk about what resources my particular world view or faith has to contribute to a pluralistic society in America, I'll mention that too, but here's the four things. Number one, I think the first thing we're going to have to do is we're probably going to have to say John Rawls was wrong.

Rawls, you might know, believed that you should not bring religious language into public discourse. You shouldn't give religious reasons for a particular law or particular norm that you are contending for, that we should always be rational and neutral and we should never bring religion into it. The first thing we're going to have to do is to say that is a great way of marginalizing a lot of people.

Stephen Carter, you know, the AO in his book, "The Descent of the Governance" said this, "efforts to craft a public square from which religious conversation is absent, no matter how thoughtfully worked out, will always in the end say to those of organized religion that they alone, unlike everyone else, must enter public dialogue only after leaving behind that part of themselves they may consider the most vital." Now, and let me just say something quick to defend what I'm about to say. W. K. Clifford brought a very famous essay in 1877, it was famous for a while anyway, called "The Ethics of Belief" and in it he said this very famous thing, his famous statement in it was this. "In the ethics of belief" he said, "it is wrong always everywhere and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence." And his point was that you should never believe anything unless you've got empirical evidence for it.

And the trouble with religion is as soon as you make religious claims there's no way to prove those things, so the O.K. just kept out of the public square. There's probably not an epistemology course in the country taught by any philosophy professor at any accredited university that would actually give you that thing to read and say, "That's my view" because it's pretty widely understood now that most of the things that we hold dear, most of the things we believe, most of the things that we believe that mean the most to us could not be empirically proven. I'll give you one example, human rights.

Alan Dershowitz in his book "Shouting Fire" says he asked this question, "What if you come to a country where they say, "Why should we believe in human rights?" And if you

don't want to just say, because I feel human rights are good things, if you want to say something more powerful than that, what do you say? He says only four things to say. One is, he can do what Martin Luther King Jr. said, which is, "All human beings have inherent equal dignity because they're made in the image of God." Now Dershowitz says, "But for him, he's an atheist, so he just can't go there so that he can't say that." He says, "The second thing you'd say is, well, human rights are natural. You can see them in nature." He says, "The problem with that is, if you actually look at nature, it's kind of violent.

The strong, the weak and that kind of thing." So it's a little hard to get the idea of inherent dignity of every human being from nature. The third thing you could say is we create human rights. We just get together and we legislate them.

He says, "The problem with that is, if human rights are the creation of the majority, they're useless." Because the whole point of a human right is to take the right of a minority and put it in the face of the majority and say, "You have to honor the rights of my people or my client. If they're created, then they can be uncreated." And that means they're useless. So he says, "What is it? Then what do you say?" He says, "Here's what you have to say.

We just know they're there. Human rights have to be discovered, not created. They have to be there.

Otherwise, they're useless. And they are. Why are they there? We don't know.

But they are." And then Dershowitz says, "I know that if somebody comes to me and says, 'Well, that's just what you white Western individualistic people say.' He says, 'Well, that's a problem. But I just know that this isn't just something from my culture. They're just there.' And then he says, "Alimately," he comes and says, "Most of the human race now believes that they're there.

And that's why we know they're there." But the real problem, of course, is, is he said, "If is it really true that what the majority of human beings think is right is necessarily right? No." So in the end, can he prove human rights? Can you empirically prove them? Is it something? No, it's a faith leap. It's a leap of faith. It's an assumption.

There's as much evidence for human rights as there is for God, but that's another lecture. In fact, I think there's probably more evidence for God than there is for human rights. The point of the matter is they are both non-provable empirically, and they're not self-evident.

The existence of God, the existence of human rights. And therefore, we all are bringing non-provable moral intuitions and convictions into the public square, and we ought to let them come. We ought to let everybody talk about it, and not say, "Oh, you're imposing

your religion on me." Everybody is taking non-provable intuitions about human nature, about right and wrong, and you're bringing them into the public square, and you're trying to get them into legislation.

Everybody's doing that. Everybody's being exclusive in that sense. So that's number one.

Let's open the dialogue to everybody. Number two. Let's make sure that as much as possible, when we argue, we look for overlapping values, that the different moral frameworks have.

There are overlapping values, and as much as possible, argue to a person from a different moral framework within their framework. So, for example, Charles Taylor, the philosopher, wrote an article some years ago called an "Unforced Consensus on Human Rights." And he says, "If you're going to Thailand, and you're trying to make a case that you need to be stronger on human rights, you don't say, "Why don't you become secular like us?" He says, "You go into Buddhism and say, "Are there resources inside the Buddhist moral framework for human rights?" He thinks there are. Instead of just saying, "Well, when you Easterners become secular and enlightened like us Westerners, which by the way is an incredible imperialism," it says, "If you do that, of course, all they people are going to do is put up walls.

Instead, when you argue, look for overlapping consensus, and look at..." If you're going to argue, argue within their moral framework, say, "I know what your framework is, and so why don't you see this?" Number three, then take a vote. Number one, open to everybody. Number two, look for overlapping consensus and try as much as possible to work inside people's moral frameworks.

Then number three, argue and argue and then take a vote, and it's democracy. Whoever has the most votes wins, and that's the legislation, and the norms, the moral norms, who get the most votes, those the norms are going to be enshrined in our law. Number four, really, really, really respect minorities.

My father was a conscientious objector in World War II. He was a pacifist. He had only one friend that he maintained from before World War II, and he kept after World War II.

Lost all of his friends. And yet, he was a conscious objector. Now, World War II, you had a fight in order to defend our freedom.

It was a law that if you were a male of a certain age, you had to be subject to the draft, was a law. But America has always said, "If your religious conscience doesn't allow you to do that, then we're not going to force you." And that's... I just... I hope we don't go away from that, and I do think there's a very good possibility there is. So here's the four things that I'm done.

Oh, one last thing. I'm sorry. There's five.

The one thing was, open to everybody. The second thing is to argue the way I was saying. The third thing is, take a vote.

The fourth thing is, respect minorities. Here's the last thing. John Heit in his book talks about the righteous mind, in his righteous mind book, he talks about the righteous mind.

At one point, he actually says, "He believes that human beings are programmed not just to be righteous, but to be self-righteous." There is no doubt in my mind that that is the main problem. The reason why we haven't had a pluralistic society. It's not just that people believe that they're right.

Everybody believes that they're right. Everybody. If you're an atheist, if you're an agnostic, if you're a Christian, if you're a Muslim, you believe you're right.

Your take on spiritual realities is right. The real question is, how self-righteous are you? How condescending are you? How disdainful are you? That's the question. All I can tell you, those who are here who are Christians, you've got something in the very middle of your Christian faith, which ought to destroy self-righteousness and make you, at the very least, agents of pluralism and civility.

It's the idea that you are saved by grace alone, not by your good works. I've got a Muslim family on my floor, a Hindu family on my floor, an atheist, a couple on my floor. And because I'm a Christian, I know that I'm not saved.

I'm not a Christian. I don't have a relationship with God because I'm better, but because of God's grace, because Jesus Christ died from me, and I believe in Him. It's not because I'm a better person or a smarter person or a more moral person.

So when I talk to my Hindu or my Muslim or my atheist neighbors, I have every reason to expect they could be better people than me. I have every reason to believe that their husbands could be better husbands than me. Every reason to believe that.

I have every reason to believe they might be better people than me. Why? Because my understanding of how Christianity works, how salvation works, is that I have no basis for that kind of superiority. So there really actually is something in the very center of Christianity that ought to make you make us, those Christians.

Someone who really can be part of making for a pluralistic society. After 9/11, excuse me, after 9/11, two days after 9/11, we were reading all these articles in the paper about how this is what religious fundamentalism brings violence. And my wife, Kathy, was hearing me read one of those editorials out loud, and she says, "Nah, not necessarily." She says, "Religious fundamentalism doesn't necessarily lead to violence." She said, "It depends on what your fundamental is." Have you ever seen an Amish terrorist? And what she means is, if the very center of your faith is a man dying for his enemies, a man who wouldn't strike back, a man who's saying, "Father forgive them, they don't know

what they're doing." Yeah, you know, Christians have been agents of oppression.

But in spite of not because of, was it the heart of their faith? So John Hyde Prime, I sure, has his own approach to how do you deal with the self-righteousness? That's the Christian approach, and it's a powerful one. Thank you. [applause] Well, thank you, Tim.

Thank you, Tamari. This is so exciting for me to be here because I've been at NYU for five years now, but I've been over in the Stern School the entire time. I've only taught MBA students.

I've only addressed undergrads a couple times. Raise your hand if you're an NYU undergrad in this room. Okay, so about two thirds or three quarters.

So I'm so excited because this is totally the quintessential NYU experience. This is like what I was imagined NYU would be. To be in a room here, it's a discussion, maybe a debate between a Christian and an atheist, and we're looking up fifth avenue at the Empire State Building, and we're in a room that looks like a 1970s disco.

Oh, I mean, this is like totally NYU. I'm really psyched about this. And you're all instructed, right? You're all instructed.

Oh, be sure to sit only with people who have a different worldview than you. So again, totally NYU. I'm really, really excited.

Okay, and thank you to the Veritas Foundation, Veritas Group, whatever it is, for them. For bringing this all together, because the things we're talking about tonight about pluralism and how do we get along despite our differences? I mean, it's been topical for a long time, but man, in the last couple months, like long since after this evening was planned, has it become topic number one? Now, I was asked, I think we were both asked in our questions to prepare, what is your vision for a moral framework for a pluralistic society include a description of your worldview, faith background, and why this is relevant for you? So, okay, so I thought, actually, I think this will work quite well. And so the point for me to say is that I'm Jewish, and this is relevant to discussion in two ways.

One is that I was raised in a reform Jewish family in Scarsdale, in Westchester County, very little actual religion, just a lot of food and, you know, bar mitzvahs and things like that. I had a bar mitzvah, but I know that within two years of my bar mitzvah, I was debating with my best friend who was the son of an Episcopalian minister. I was debating with him the existence of God and I was taking the con side.

So I was an atheist by the time I was 15 or 16. By the time I was in college, I was a rather hostile atheist. I thought religion was a giant lie.

I thought it was oppressive. I was on the side of truth. So I had the new atheists been around, and I would have been one.

So I was fairly hostile to religion. From the time I was in college, and it was in part from reading the Bible, from part from reading the Old Testament, and taking it literally. I guess now we know I should have taken it seriously, but not literally.

But anyway, I took it literally and I did not want it. So I was very hostile to religion for a long time, but I started studying morality in graduate school. And once I started studying morality and culture, looking across cultures, I then started studying religion and the way that morality and religion have co-evolved in the human past.

I started realizing that actually, religion, I believe, is an absolutely essential part of our evolutionary history. We would not have civilization. We would not have morality if we did not evolve to be religious, both biologically and culturally.

Furthermore, I started reading the empirical research on the effects of religion. And at least in the United States, those effects are overwhelmingly positive. There's an important book called "American Grace" by Robert Putnam and somebody Campbell.

And they basically come to the conclusion from survey data and other kinds of data that members of religious communities are simply better citizens. They give more not just to their religious communities, but to their society in a variety of ways, in all sorts of ways that even secular people would grant. It's not belief.

It's participation in a religious community has effects that rain in people's selfishness and draws them out into community. I'd like to believe that I simply was persuaded by the evidence. I have no idea why I was persuaded.

But I'm actually, I would almost say, a fan of religion now. I think that religion in America in particular, where we've had relatively benign religions that have sort of competed to attract adherence. So we have a sort of competition of religions because of our pluralism here that's made American religions really effective and appealing.

So I am a fan of religion and I believe that as religion has faded away, as a common religion that Tim was talking about, the Protestant consensus, as that has faded away, I think that's an important part of the problems and predicament we find ourselves in now, much closer to a state of anomie or normlessness, as Emile Durkheim called it. So that's one line for me to have gone from being a Jewish atheist who is hostile to religion to being a Jewish atheist who actually is generally positive towards religion. The second line, the second reason why being Jewish is important here is that I was raised by parents who were first generation.

They were children of immigrants from the old country, from Poland and Russia. And this was the great, great generation of Jewish assimilation. My grandparents all fled pogroms and violence in Poland and Russia.

They came to America. They were not welcomed with open arms, but they were not

rejected. They were basically just let free to do their thing.

Sure, my parents couldn't join certain country clubs. Who cares? I was raised to believe. I was told directly by my parents that Israel is not the promised land for the Jews.

Israel is a really tough place to live. My parents never even wanted to go to Israel. I was told that America was the promised land.

America is the land overflowing with milk and honey. My father's generation, they were all born poor. They went on to be tremendously successful in business and culture and the academy.

And this was during the time of the Protestant hegemony. David Brooks had an amazing column when President Obama appointed his first or second Supreme Court justice. It became the case for the first time in American history that there was not a single wasp as president, vice president on the Supreme Court leading either party in the house or the senate.

Everybody was Jewish, Catholic, or Mormon. And Brooks was pointing out that while the wasps weren't perfect, this particular governing consensus, yes, they had their prejudices, but they basically set up a relatively open meritocracy and accepted the results. So this is all background to my saying, I am a big, big fan of assimilation.

And what I mean by that is not the version Tim quoted somebody says, it means you agree on everything. No, I think of assimilation as the assimilation I experienced growing up Jewish in a town where everybody was Jewish, Irish, Italian, wasp, just a couple of African Americans, a couple of Iranians, things like that. So we had some diversity.

These were all groups that had been, you might say, marginalized 50 years before, but by the 60s and 70s, it didn't really matter very much. And by the 90s it barely mattered at all. So I'm a huge fan of assimilation that says you don't have to conform on everything.

We do have a shared consensus which is called the American civic religion, as Robert Bella called it. We do have a kind of a worshipful attitude towards the constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and American tradition. So this is the time in history when I was raised.

I think it was a kind of a golden age, I would even say of American pluralism, in that we went from a time of, we think the 50s is a kind of a time of closiveness and intolerance, and obviously lots of groups were denied full participation in rights. But my entire life was one giant sweep of more rights for everybody with gay people and now transgender being the last ones to get full or nearly full rights of participation. So I'm a big fan of assimilation for personal reasons, I'll say, and that perhaps has colored my academic work.

So now on to my last point, which is now I'll speak not as an American Jew, but as a social psychologist who studies morality. And the two things you need to know about morality are, one, we evolved to be tribal creatures. The whole secret, the reason why we dominate the planet and know other primates does is that we figured out how to cooperate in small groups to either beat the hell out of other groups, take their land, or just out produce them.

We are tribalists, we're really, really good at it. But we don't have to be, that's the amazing thing. Under certain circumstances, if you get the parameters set right, we love to trade, explore, travel, meet new people, try new foods.

So we're tribalists, but we're not obligatory tribalists, and this is crucial. Because for a long time, America did things pretty well to tone down the tribalism. And now I think we're doing just about everything wrong.

The second thing you need to know about us is that our reasoning evolved to help us persuade other people. We did not evolve to help us find the truth. Our reasoning is generally post hoc justification.

You've all heard the phrases going around, confirmation bias, motivated reasoning. This is the basis of fake news, of all sorts of things. We believe whatever we want to believe, we believe what our team wants us to believe.

So take these two things. We're tribalists who reason to justify not to find truth. Put us together.

We evolved for these small-scale tribal societies. Over the course of history, driven in part by developments of religion, we developed very large societies. We developed empires that are able to have multiracial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious societies, as they did in Rome, in the Ottoman Empire, in the Muslim kingdoms.

So we are able to develop these large-scale societies, but you have to look, with a large-scale society composed of these tribalists, you have to look at the balance between what are the centrifugal forces blowing us outwards? They're always there. What are the centripetal forces pulling us in? They're always there. As long as the centripetal forces are much stronger, then you can have a decent, multi-ethnic, multiracial, pluralist society, because you have forces of unification, forces of unity, shared sacred values, shared beliefs, shared traditions.

And when those centripetal forces weaken, you can expect revolution, chaos, cycle of declining trust, and the decay of a society. This last year, 2016, I think, is best compared to the year 1968, a year when centrifugal forces were extraordinarily strong. There was a lot of violence.

The centrifugal forces, the violence, were much stronger in 1968 than they were in 2016

or 2017. But the centripetal forces holding us together were so much stronger then, that the nation was able to make it through. Now, we have very little holding us together.

And I won't go into detail because it's too depressing and pessimistic. And in the discussion, I will try to also put in a few points of levity and optimism because I think it is not all hopeless. But I do think that we are facing a national emergency, and I don't think we understand it.

Many people think the national emergency is Trump. I will say that while I do side with you on most matters with regard to that, I'm focused not just on the damage to democratic norms that I believe Donald Trump has done. I'm focused on the more serious, well, possibly more, who knows.

But the very serious problem that even after Trump is gone, our democracy is so damaged, we have done so much to weaken the centripetal forces pulling us together that our future is really uncertain. I think this is the national emergency that I hope your generation will take up as its primary cause, although I am doubtful that you will. Okay, with that, I will turn it over now to, I guess, discussion.

So thank you both to Tim and John. So much to discuss. I'm going to start small, and then we'll build into the dialogue.

So let's take a step back and even think about, should we be talking about these issues in a university setting? So, John, you've written quite a bit about the lack of reason to debate in universities and civil discourse, and actually I can relate to that as an instructor as well, and one of my students put it this way. We can only discuss when we all agree, and that was the feeling. Oh my God.

Yes, yes. So is the university really the place for these kinds of discussions on controversial issues like morality, religion, politics, and why? So we can discuss all sorts of things at NYU. We just can't discuss sacred values, and what I mean by that is that the way to understand, so I'm a Durkheimian.

That means the sociologist Emile Durkheim. I think he was one of the wisest people who ever lived. I think of him as one of the greatest founders of the social sciences, and he interpreted all the crazy things people do as attempts to form groups, to form tribes.

Tribes unify around sacred values. It can be a rock, or a tree, or a book, or a person. It can be a sports team, or a TV show, or Harley Davidson.

But whatever that group unifies around, if anyone insults that or disagrees with it, they're in big trouble and they're out of the group. So we're used to thinking of this for religion. We know what blasphemy laws, sacrilegial laws.

We know about all that for formal religions. But I think what you have to see happening

in America as a dominant religious frame has retreated, is we've had the rise of multiple sacred values in multiple groups around the country, many of which are extraordinarily illiberal. I spent the last few days.

Somebody sent me various links to the dark enlightenment, the riacneoreaction, all the stuff that Steve Bannon is influenced by. And it is quite a wormhole. It is extraordinarily illiberal.

They dislike democracy and they were working to overthrow it. So we're seeing the rise of all these groups on the right that are quasi-religious movements that are deeply incompatible democracy. But as you mentioned by coddling of the American Mind article, we've seen the rise of illiberalism on the left.

And this is the problem in universities that because there are certain sacred values related to certain topics and groups, and I have to be very careful what I say because this talk is going online, so I actually cannot talk openly to you. But there are many things we cannot say, cannot talk about because they will be sent out on social media, taken out of context, and you can have your career ended. So no, I've stopped being provocative.

At NYU, I can be a little more provocative if I'm elsewhere, but I'm very careful when I'm here on campus. Tim, presumably your foundation for morality as a Christian is the Bible. So how can someone like you with this obvious base for morality enter into even a pluralistic discussion about morality when many people may not even agree with your foundation? Well, I spoke a little bit to that, I think.

For example, Michael Sandell, Harvard University, wrote a book, he teaches kind of a masterclass there on justice, and he wrote a book that basically writes up, it's an undergraduate course, and he wrote a book called Justice, What's the Right Thing to Do? He points out that there's at least three theories of justice that are at work in our society right now, which is the utilitarian view, which is the just thing is the greatest good for the greatest number. He says, "The Kantian view, which is justice is all about the individual getting their rights, not the greater good." And then there's the Aristotelian view, which is, "Justice is getting what you deserve." And he says, there's a great line where he says, "All theories of justice are judgmental." And what he means is, there is no way to prove which one of these things is the right approach. He says they're all grounded in somewhat different understandings of the relationship of the individual to society, different understandings of actually human nature, different understandings of maybe even the purpose of human life, a different accounts of what is a good human life.

Now these things can be empirically proven. So he says in the end, at the bottom, as soon as you say, that's a justice issue, which people do it in way all the time and other places, that's a justice issue. He says, "depends on your theory of justice.

The theories of justice are very complicated. They're rooted in non-provable and non-self-evident intuitions about human life and human nature, and therefore everybody is coming in to public discourse with a set of moral norms that you can't prove to somebody else. Nobody can completely just prove their moral framework.

So, yeah, I'm coming with the Bible. But frankly, my moral framework isn't, "I don't think more exclusive than somebody else's because it's in a sense based on faith." To me, what we need in the public square is not to change our views. When somebody says, "You views are too narrow," I say, "Well, it's the attitude." Tolerance, humility, and respect.

I actually feel like if-- here's a Buddhist, here's a Muslim, here's an atheist, here's a Christian, all of them are bringing into public discourse values that they can't prove. So they're all, in a sense, operating in faith in some way. What I'm really going to be watching is, which one out of-- have the resources in their worldview to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with? That's the most important thing we need at this point.

That's what people on the right and the left, and actually, frankly, even-- I actually do see people in the center, I would say, who don't seem to be as extreme, but actually are as hard to talk to as anybody else. So I would-- like that, I would say that I don't think that because I do say the Bible is the ground for my moral framework that I'm somehow more narrow than somebody else's. What is the slur on centrist, you're saying here? Well, I'm a centrist, and that is to say, I've always been a political centrist.

So in other words, I would say, well, I'm kind of conservative on this, and I'm kind of more liberal on this, and I probably because I'm an oldest child, but you're the psychologist, right? So are you, right? Anyway, I'm an oldest child, so I'm trying to please everybody. But I can-- you know, oldest children are very self-righteous. In other words, we know best, and the rest of you just don't really understand.

And there's a self-righteousness about being centrist. In fact, some of you know, I tend to do the third way thing. I tend to say, oh, well, there's, you know, you here, and my wife actually often says to me, honey, everybody, everybody in the world is unbalanced with me and you, and occasionally I wonder about you.

(Laughter) That's a smugness? That's what I'm saying. So I'm just saying, it seems like the attitudes of tolerance, humility, and patience. I got this from John and Nazu's book, Confident Pluralism.

Tolerance is not indifference. You might be appalled at the other person, but you're respectful to them. Humility is not that you don't believe you're right, but that you know the limits of what you can prove, and you also know you're always going to learn by listening.

And patience is not saying, I'm going to put up with evil, but what it is saying is, I'm not going to be too quick to posit motives, and say you must be an evil person or you must be a hostile person. So whoever can muster those kinds of virtues, that's what we need in the public square, not saying you have a more narrow moral framework, you have a more broad moral framework. I would say all moral frameworks to some degree are narrow.

It's the attitude that matters. So, Tim, you just mentioned several moral virtues, and John, I know you've written about our foundations of morality. I think it would be helpful to describe what those are of it and to talk about how that might lead to civil discussions as well as dealing with the pluralistic society.

Sure. So when I was in graduate school, the mystery, the puzzle that I worked on, was why is it that morality is different in all these different cultures, but yet you find these elements that are so similar, ideas about puriting pollution and reciprocity. And so, drawing on ideas of my postdoctoral supervisor, Richard Schwader, an anthropologist, some colleagues and I developed a theory called moral foundations theory.

We looked at what are likely to be the taste buds of the moral sense. And two of them are shared by everybody right, left and center. So one is care, sort of care and compassion, nurture, ins were mammals.

We built and take care of children. And the left builds a lot of its moral arguments, moral appeals on that foundation, caring for the vulnerable. The second is fairness.

Everybody says they value fairness. The left tends to focus more on fairness as equality. The right tends to focus more on fairness as proportionality, including ideas of karma, karmic payback, including negative responses to negative deeds.

So those two everybody understands, although left and right use them somewhat differently. But then there are a variety of virtues that are very common throughout the world, that are the basis of tribalism and religious groupings, virtues of loyalty, authority and sanctity. Those three have faded out of Western secular egalitarian cultures.

That's what a lot of the culture war has been for several decades now, is what is legitimacy of loyalty, authority and sanctity? Or do we go with much more of a John Rawls, all that matters as human rights, especially of the most vulnerable? Those are all coherent views, but they clash, they're incompatible. Just out of curiosity, in this room, would you say you're on the left, on the right, the center, or libertarian? So that's what I'm going to ask you to raise your hand for. So would you say, raise your hand if you say you're on the left, liberal or Democrat, or Democrat, raise your hand high? Okay, wow, not that many.

All right, raise your hand if you'd say you're on the right or conservative, or you vote

Republican, raise your hand. Okay, last but... Actually, no, okay, raise your hand if you're in the center politically. That's actually the largest group so far, and libertarian.

Raise your hand if you'd call yourself libertarian. Okay, this is the most evenly, the most... It's politically diverse group I've ever spoken to. It's probably us.

We've attracted the centrists. Oh my God, you're right. You're right.

That's right, you're right. And the far left hate us both. We need to stay together.

We need to stay together. We need to do more things. Okay, but anyway, the point of it is just the main point is everybody, while we all have the same taste buds in our mouth, we don't all like the same food, and that has a lot to do, has a little to do with our genetics, and has a lot to do with our culture that we're raised in.

Similarly, we all recognize, we all understand loyalty, we kind of understand authority and things like that. But if you're raised sort of on the left or progressive culture, you're wary of those, you have mixed feelings, and you blame people who have religious laws based on that, you think they're being unfair, unjust. And so there's actually some new research out showing the basic way to talk to people, the most important way, and actually you said this in your remarks, speak their language.

If you're on the left and you couch everything in terms of the rights of the vulnerable, people aren't, you know, they've heard it before. They're not going to be moved, but if you couch it in terms of their own traditions, if you couch it in terms of the need for an ordered society in which we all can be free to pursue, you know, you can make your argument. If you have a little bit of empathy and perspective taking, you'll be much more effective in everything you do, including work and marriage.

Okay, I had something. The essence of a persuasive statement is this. You believe A, right? Everybody, yeah, we are.

Well, if you believe A, why don't you believe B? See, now, if you're trying to get somebody to B, the only way to do it is not to say, I'm right and you're wrong, I believe B and you don't. Instead, you say, if you believe in A, why doesn't that move you at least to appreciate B, or why doesn't that move you in the direction of B? So when you come into somebody and you affirm something they already believe and then try to bring them to the next place, that's actually persuasion. Let me just -- don't follow that advice.

I don't think that's exactly right because if you say to someone, okay, you believe A, why don't you believe B? You're telling them, think about why you don't believe B, and they can do it. They can always do it. Let me suggest this.

Just read Dale Carnegie. So I'm sorry, who am I to question one of the most successful pastors in New York? Don't listen to me. Give me a break.

But when you consider that a little -- excuse me, wouldn't that be -- isn't that a little more above board? In other words, I don't want to be manipulative, too. So start by not just saying you believe A, okay, start by saying, you know, I think you believe A, right? And they say yes. You know, I think you're right about that.

You find something that they're right about. And if possibly say, you know, and sometimes people on my side, you know, we believed in X policy and you know, you guys are right, that didn't work out so well. Now you've really got the power of reciprocity working for you.

Now that's right. I agree with you. And then you say, then you don't say, why don't you believe X? You say, now, consider X. And then you make arguments for X in terms of their more.

You're just showing that you shouldn't go there too fast. Okay. You shouldn't go -- I believe -- yeah, I agree with you completely.

And that's a very good nuance. Okay. There, we had a debate.

Yeah, not much of one. But you're right. You're absolutely right.

I don't want to give people the impression you do it. You're right, too. Yeah.

[ Laughter ] So now let's dive a little bit deeper and think about the real heart. Obviously we know there's a lot of conflict and disagreement in society, especially today. And as both of you have talked about in other spaces, people don't just disagree with each other these days anymore.

It's more thinking the other side is evil, that people are a threat to society. And so both of you touched on a bit about how we can work in this pluralistic society. Tim, could you tell us more about how we would actually respect minority opinions once there is, let's say, an open discussion and then a vote? Then how are those opinions of people whose values perhaps aren't agreed upon? How do we support and respect them? Well, you know, I used my father as an example.

I've always -- you know, I grew up every year, the COs, the conscience objectors would get together somewhere. The people who were actually -- during World War II were serving in basically most of the conscience objectors in World War II served in very dangerous wards of mental hospitals. There's some books written about the fact that the conscience objectors actually changed the culture in a lot of those places.

A lot of those people that they were working with had been just locked away. You know, the story -- the stories of the Amish is a good example. The Amish are quaint, but the fact of the matter is the Amish are -- have just dropped out in many ways and are given a great deal of leeway when it comes to whether, you know, in a lot of areas, I actually

did a little bit of studies some years ago and asked a couple lawyers about, you know, just how much leeway is given to the Amish to be themselves.

But I think we ought to look at our own history. Traditionally, there has been a great deal of wide-birth given to people of religious minorities. And I do think that we ought to go back to that and not say, you know, that was then, this is now.

I know that, for example, my father actually did get a lot of -- my father told me not to let people know when I was growing up in school that he had not served in World War II. I mean, I grew up in the '50s, and that wasn't that long before. The World War II was very well -- you know, a lot of people lost friends, people lost family members.

I remember that everybody remember World War II very well. My father said, you know, I'm not ashamed of my position, and I'll defend it. But there's no particular reason why you should get into a fight at school over it.

That's my only -- my memory is that the conscience objectors were both proud, but they didn't push themselves. They didn't push -- in other words, they weren't constantly demanding recognition. That's another thing the minorities are going to have to do.

There are not -- Charles Taylor, the philosopher, says that there's something about our modern identity that's fragile. We feel like we feel the need for confirmation from absolutely everybody. My father kind of knew who he was, and the conscience objectors knew who they were, and they made this decision, and they didn't really need everybody to affirm them.

If they had tried to do that, it would have just been one battle after another. Today, I think if Christians, for example, if Orthodox, small O, Christians like that I represent, become a smaller and smaller minority, we got to be very -- it would be very wrong for us to demand people respect us. And honor us all the time.

I think that would be actually a pretty bad idea. What you really want is just to have the freedom to express and practice your faith. You want there to be respectful conversations when you are talking in public.

I should not need people to be celebrating who we are all the time. So minorities, I do think, have to -- I think in the past -- actually, even -- I think John and Professor Heither has been saying the way his own parents dealt with their minority status was pretty interesting. It was -- they realized they weren't getting everything that they probably should get.

They probably would contend for their rights, but they also weren't constantly demanding recognition. So if there's some way to go back to that approach to -- it would be better. I would love to hear what Professor Heither says about that.

Yes, please share. So you just restate the question. Of course.

And I'll make it a bit more specific to your comment. So you mentioned how there are different forces holding society together and also pulling us apart and how those forces holding us together are not as strong as they once were, let's say, in 1968. So could you tell us more about what those forces are, how we can strengthen them again? Yeah.

So the mid-20th century was an historically anomalous period, and we may never -- we'll never be able to repeat it. Nothing brings tribalists together like a giant war against absolute evil. And so all of America for decades after World War II had this gigantic boost to its moral image and to its social capital.

So that won't be repeated. Also, we had the Cold War for a while, and that -- well, I would say that's gone, but who knows? It's maybe coming back in a couple of ways. But unfortunately, see, look, we're so divided that, you know, okay, Russia is messing with our democracy.

Shouldn't that rouse us all to anger? Shouldn't that especially rouse the Republicans to anger? You look at the polling data and what people think about Putin, and we are so divided that as soon as Putin's intervening for the Republicans, oh, Republicans think he's a good guy. So, you know, I think a foreign attack on America would now actually divide us, not unite us. So you have to think about that, but there's nothing you can really do there.

So, you know, immigration was cut off. In the 1920s, effectively, we had very high immigration in the 19th century, at the time when my parents came in. My grandparents came in.

And immigration does a lot for country. Economically, you get more eminent people, more creativities. There's a lot good about immigration.

But speaking as a social scientist, I have to say, immigration, like most interesting things, is complicated. It does many good things. It does many bad things, but we cannot talk about the bad things.

So our publications, our conferences, all we do is talk about the good things, and therefore we get immigration policies wrong, and the same happens in Europe. So, American particular must always be open to immigrants, and for God's sakes, especially refugees. But, as I said, I'm a fan of assimilation.

If you're going to have moderate to high levels of immigration, you really, really need to have an assimilationist program. The kids must learn the language and become fluent quickly. You have to do everything you can to blur the boundaries, hide the lines.

The more you give immigrants identity politics, the more you're just increasing the

centrifugal forces, and not condemning them. But you are, well, I am with Mark Lilla and others that identity politics, while I understand the reasons for it to some extent, identity politics is a setback for the very groups that it claims to be helping. So I think that we need to move ahead, I don't know if we can ever recover the American civic religion, but I think that identity politics is one of the causes, one of the reasons why I think things are going to get a lot worse, a lot more divided in this country.

And my plea to you is to look for other ways to think about identity, immigration, and diversity, the ways that are presented in certain departments in the academy, I think do more harm than good. So we're going to turn it to the small tables in a moment, but do either of you have any final thoughts before the groups discuss and then present some more questions? So I just have to do something to erase the incredible pessimism that I've put out there, because it's something that's going through my mind a lot. So I shared it with you, and I probably should not have done that unmixed.

So let me at least provide some warnings and cautions and reversals, which is, one, it has always been a bad idea to bet against America. America has had huge problems before, we've had a civil war, the 1820s was terrible, and we've always come through. So don't bet against America is the first thing.

Second thing is it's almost impossible to predict the future, and the experts, you know, they missed, the economists missed, the financial collapse, the foreign policy experts missed the collapse of the Soviet Union, so we really don't know what's going to happen. I'm looking at a variety of trends that I think are worrisome, but you know, I'm not looking for real estate in New Zealand, and I haven't pulled all my money out of the stock market. So we need to think really carefully together about what's going on, but in general many things about history getting better, and let's not lose sight of that.

So take my pessimism. More is just a thing to think about. I hope it's not like emotionally contagious.

Okay, that's it. Yeah, let me add to the optimism a bit, and now the reason I'm able to agree with Professor Heid on this, is, yeah, okay, John, not John. I'm calling you Tim, so it'd be totally weird if you called me Professor Heid.

You mean you called me Tim? Yeah, I did. I noticed that. I'm a lot older than you too.

That was kind of a lot of his foot, but that's all right. I didn't realize that your doctor father was Richard Schweder. My doctor father, yes, my postdoc advisor.

No, postdoc advisor. He's a guy that did the White Amen barbecue. Yeah, that's a great question.

Yeah, I read his postdoc advisor. I read some of his stuff some years ago, and he's similarly positive about religion, just like John is. He points out, for example, that if you're

trying to deal with suffering, he says one of the most important things, and one article I read, one of the most important things that a society can do for someone, is to help them, equip them to face suffering.

And he says, you know, every religious society has more resources for its members than non-religious societies. He said, like, if you're a Hindu, you believe in karma, which means, hey, things are bad, but you know, things will get better. And besides that, you're paying for something that you did before anyway.

Christians have got heaven. Everybody's got something. You know, the Northern European pagan said, well, if you go down in blazes, then you'll sleep well with your fathers, and you'll go to their long home, and you will not be ashamed even in their mighty company.

And he says secularism actually gives you fewer resources for dealing with suffering. And yeah, I actually do think that religion is going to be growing in the United States, because it's growing in the world. It's growing everywhere.

It's true that everybody says, wait a minute, aren't you, people in America less religious? Yeah, true. But if you take a look at the statistics around the world, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, every world religion is growing. And religion is growing, especially amongst non-Western and non-white people.

It's growing in this country. It's growing in this city. And I think as long as if the religionists can dig into their own religious heritage to find its resources for pluralism, I've already mentioned some Christian ones.

Charles Taylor says he thinks that every single religion has got those resources. I think it's going to be like, I would say, salt and light inside our society. I don't think it's going to become an overwhelmingly secular society.

We will have a lot of jostling because we won't have one moral framework. But there's other ways in which, like you said before, religion is basically good for people. And there is a lot of overlapping consensus too.

So I'm actually relatively positive in the long run about. I just don't see the decline narratives don't completely make sense to me. On that optimistic note, let's turn to our tables and discuss.

Thank you guys for coming. I love the discussion, perhaps a debate. So I'm representing the secular student alliance.

And I suppose you'll have to forgive me a little bit with this question. It's not 100% relevant specifically to the discussion we had tonight, but it's sort of been a burning question of mine for the past couple of years, which I'm going to answer. And to finish

the preface of this question, if anyone else has an answer to this, please find me afterwards.

I'd love to hear what you'd have to say. So this is really for Pastor Keller. I found something of a logical flaw with Christianity that has sort of been bothering me.

Personally, I'm an atheist, but I'd love to learn a little bit more. So basically, if we give -- we have the assumption that the Christian God is a God that is all powerful and also benevolent. If we take that as an assumption with the reality that there is clearly suffering in the world, and often Christians will say that the reason for the suffering is so that you can appreciate the good more.

So I feel like this sort of paradigm is sort of illogical. It doesn't really -- it doesn't follow the logic that the Christian God is benevolent. So what would you say to this argument to add a little bit more meat if I was God, if I was benevolent, all powerful, I wouldn't have created suffering at all.

Yeah, no, you're being very clear. And this is the oldest -- one of the oldest, if not the oldest, and probably most -- probably most prevalent objection to the traditional understanding of God. If God is all powerful and all good, but he allows suffering, then he either might be all powerful, but not good.

He might be good and all powerful. There is Alvin Plantinga in the last two or three decades, and a number of other philosophers have kind of put that argument to rest philosophically. It just hasn't trickled down very far.

What they point out is this. You're assuming that because there's a premise that gets pushed in there. There's a syllogism.

And basically say, an all-powerful and all-good God would not allow suffering that has no good reason. But we see suffering with no good reason. Therefore, there can't be an all-powerful and good God.

Obviously, if you saw suffering that had some incredibly good reason that in the end actually justified the suffering, then, of course, well, then, obviously, you have an all-good and all-powerful wise God. But so what Alvin Plantinga would say is, when you say there can't be a God, you're assuming that just because you can't see a reason for the suffering that is allowed, there can't be any. Right.

Perhaps I'll specify that sort of the problem that I have is that I disagree with this syllogism that if there is a good reason, then suffering is justified, I don't think, you know, that sort of a paradigm itself. There couldn't be any good reason for the suffering that's happened. Right.

I think why not? Well, you know, the basis of the question is that if there is some good

reason, you know, if God created the entire paradigm itself, why create it? You know, if there's some benefit that comes from suffering, why not instill that in humans innately? So you're saying because you can't imagine what benefit there could be eventually, because you can't foresee it, there can't be such a benefit? No, I think there could be a benefit. I'm just saying, why not have that benefit at the beginning? Why not let us know? He might have a good reason for that, too. See, listen, I'm not saying evil is not a huge problem for Christians.

I'm just saying it doesn't disprove the existence of God. And right now, I don't know of a reputable philosopher actually that does claim that for this very reason. I'm giving you a cold answer.

Those of you who are actually suffering out here, this is a cold answer. And the cold answer is that no, it doesn't disprove the existence of a good, all-powerful God, because there might actually be some reason why if we actually saw it, it would say, oh, that makes sense, and I can see why you didn't tell human beings about it, too. And if you say, no, that can't exist, well, see, that's the mistake, planning, I would say, just because you can't imagine there be such an answer doesn't mean there can't be an answer.

But having said that, the Christian answer is God comes into the world in the form of Jesus Christ, and God becomes, even though he's divine, this is what no other religion will say. God has actually experienced suffering. He went to the cross, he experienced the suffering.

He does that in order to save the world. And so, even though we still don't know what the reason for suffering is, we do know what it isn't. It isn't that God doesn't love us.

I mean, God loves us so much that he would experience us suffering. So it can't be that God doesn't care. So that's a consolation.

Most Christians say, look, God understands my suffering, and whatever the reasons are that he's allowing it, it must be good. I know why, because he loves us so much that he would come and be involved with the suffering. So that doesn't prove there is no God, and it also doesn't prove there is a God.

But it's an answer. The answer is it doesn't disprove God, and there's a consolation, at least in Christian belief. Thank you.

Oh, well. Thank you. I have several questions up here, as you can see, and I want to start with the practical to make sure we get to it.

So many of you have asked, and we've discussed up here, what can we do practically? How can we have conversations with people who have a different moral foundation or different morality in general? What are some practical steps we in this community can do? This is for both of you. Okay, for an opinion. I'd be happy to take that.

So I'm realizing before when I said that I was not optimistic that your generation will take up this challenge, I realized that was a really obnoxious thing to say, and I apologize to you for it. What was getting me down was that there's a lot of polling data showing that millennials have much less endorsement or supportive free speech and democracy. But there's a reason for that.

You have not seen democracy working very well in your lives, and you've been exposed to an awful lot of nasty stuff on social media. So I understand why those numbers are going down. And at some point, I'm actually, I'm sure, people in your generation are going to start to say, you know what? We have to start doing things differently, we have to start doing it ourselves.

And I think it's going to be things like, how do you behave on social media? Social media makes it so easy to join mobs to shame or attack someone. And that's really, really powerful, nasty stuff that destroys people's lives, leads them to suicide. And it comes because certain algorithms work well in Facebook and Twitter and feed you what you've clicked on.

So it's going to be up to your generation to use things differently to realize the ways that these technologies are warping social behavior are in some ways damaging to democracy. In other ways, they're helpful. So your generation is extraordinarily innovative.

You're not all aiming for corporate jobs. You're much more likely to strike that on your own. So if you agree that there is a problem, then your generation is going to come up with lots and lots of ideas.

Now, I'll just give you a couple of general things. Maybe they'll be helpful. One is that the most important principle that I think is missing from social interactions these days is the principle of charity.

That is, when someone says something, we can choose whether to take it in the worst possible way so that we can argue against them and impress the other people who are watching, or we can choose to take it the most generous way. And those two are miles apart. And so when you approach anything, when someone says something that seems thoughtless, when you think about microaggressions, for example, if someone says someone says, "Oh, that's a microagression," or they want to be harsh on them, try giving them the benefit of the doubt and stand up to people and say, "Well, why don't you give them the benefit of the doubt?" So there are ways, there are just changes to human interaction that have happened in recent years that have greatly ramped up the sort of the mutual outrage.

Be sensitive to those and try to calm things down. And here's where I think religion and Christianity in particular can be so helpful. My first book was the Happiness Hypothesis,

Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom.

And the reason that I wrote it was because I was finding the same deep psychological insights in just about every religion and tradition I looked at. So I'll just read a couple of two pairs of quotes. Look how he abused me and beat me, how he threw me down and robbed me.

Live with such thoughts and you live in hate. Look how he abused me and beat me, how he threw me down and robbed me. Abandon such thoughts and live in love.

In this world, hate never yet dispelled hate. Only love dispels hate. This is the law, ancient and inexhaustible.

Now that happens to be Buddha, but obviously Jesus said very, very similar things. And you find this in so many religions. One more pair.

How easy it is to see your brother's faults, how hard to face your own. You winnow his, winnow. You winnow his in the wind like chaff.

But yours you hide like a cheat covering up an unlucky throw. That's basically a chance from Buddha. It's a translation of how can you say to your brother, let me remove the speck from your eye, etc.

So the ancients understood human nature. The ancients understood our incredible self-righteousness, our tendency to demonize and jump on and attack each other. There's a lot of wisdom that we are forgetting and that I think religions, the world's religions are repositories of that wisdom.

And I think it's up to your generation and I think religious members of religious groups. And there are also many secular groups that can do it too. Have the potential to lead to an awakening of basic human decency.

So those are my hopes for you. Yeah, I would say it's got to be local. It's got to be personal.

The interaction I just had with the guy who just asked me about evil and suffering. That was, he was good. He was respectful.

I had to be kind of brief. If we were actually sitting down and even had 15 minutes together, it would have been a vastly better interaction. Because it's something I used to do in marriage counseling.

I'm so glad I don't have marriage counseling anymore. It was very draining. But let me tell you, when things were really bad between two people, there was a, almost a trick.

It was basically a method. And I would say, here's the husband, here's the wife, they're

talking to each other. And they're just yelling at each other.

At a certain point, they say, okay, when the husband has just said something to the wife, before the wife responds, the wife has got to restate as best as possible what the husband just said. And you've got to say it until the husband says, I couldn't have said it better myself. That's what I meant.

Put it in your own words. And so in other words, it took forever to have a conversation this way. But when the person says something to you, you had to restate what you thought they just said to the place where they said, that's exactly what I meant.

In fact, you said it a little better than I just said it. And then you could respond to that. Now, actually, that's actually a very, very good thing to do.

Get people together. Say, we're going to meet together monthly. We're going to meet together weekly.

We have very, very different views. We're going to listen to each other. We're going to do something like that where we actually say, I've listened to you.

This is what I think I hear you saying to the place where the other person says, yep, that's what I meant. You said it as well as I could. Then you could go ahead and critique.

It slows it down, but do it. And I think you will learn tolerance. You will learn humility.

You will learn patience with each other. It can't be done in the courts. It can't be done in the social media.

It can't be done actually even in this room that much, even though we're both urging you all to do it. And I actually sense that we're doing something really good here tonight. Really good.

Nevertheless, to actually do what means around tables with people with different moral frameworks and moral visions, who actually are willing to say, for the next number of months or weeks, we're going to get together, get to know each other, and really do this, hear each other, listen to each other, restating each other's points of view, and then critiquing. And trying as much as possible, when you do try to convince the other person, going inside their moral framework, respecting it, and trying to help them understand, if you're going to change their mind, try to change their mind inside their framework, because that's the only possible way the person is going to make any move anyway. I also received several questions around identity.

Some of you asked for elaboration on identity politics, and also with the comment about the fragility of our identities, what are some factors that have led to this greater fragility in the American identity, and what are positive and negatives around identity politics?

Maybe Tim, you start with this one. I better start because I mentioned it, and I can just elaborate on the reference I already made. I'm sure John has more -- way more to say about this than I do.

But Charles Taylor, Canadian philosopher, did a series of lectures quite a number of years ago that in this country, they're called the Ethics of Authenticity, it's a Harvard University Press Book. He talked about the fact that in traditional societies, I'm wondering what a social psychologist thinks of this, in traditional societies, you kind of went outside to find out who you were. You went to your parents, you went to your tribe, you went outside to find your social role.

They said, and they told you, if you're going to be a good person, this is who you have to be. You go outside to find out who you are, and then you come back in and reorder your life in accord with it. Generally, in the past, you knew who am I? I'm a father, I'm a husband, I'm a son, I'm a grandfather.

In other words, your family roles were who you were. So you went outside to find your family roles and you came in to reorder your life. Taylor says, today we're told you go inside and you don't talk to anybody else.

You go inside, you look at your deepest feelings, and you decide who you are. So you don't let anybody else tell you who you are, you decide who you are. Well, he says, that naturally means that when you come out and you need all kinds of recognition, I have to say it's smothering to come from a society in which essentially your meaning in life is found by pleasing your parents, and that's basically your identity, is to please your parents.

That can be suffocating, but on the other hand, as long as your parents like you and they think you're good, your identity is secure. But if you go inside and decide who you are without any reference, Gail Sheehee in the book Passages Years ago said, you go inside and you don't ask anybody else and you decide who you are. Then when you come out, you need all kinds of affirmation from everybody and you demand recognition.

And Taylor, it's feel persuasive to me. Taylor says, as a result, a lot of modern identity is just more fragile, and we get very upset when somebody doesn't validate us. Whereas in the past, we were smothering by what our parents said or what our tribe said, but at least we knew who we were because, and we didn't need everybody in the world telling us who we were.

So I'd like to adjust the topic of identity politics as we experience it on campus now, and why is there a big debate over it? And as far as I can tell, there's two very different kinds of identity politics, and this is what causes the confusion. So if it's the case that black people are not allowed to eat in certain restaurants or drink at water fountains and you organize and march against that, yes, in a sense it's identity politics in that it's saying

there is racial injustice, there's a clear violation, and we're going to get people together and use the political system and have rallies and marches, and we're going to change that. That's fighting for justice, and that's the kind of, if you want to call that identity politics or politics about an identity group, that's one that most Americans support I certainly do, and all the people who argue against identity politics support that.

But then there's some new ideas that were nurtured in the 1990s in particular about privilege and matrices of oppression that are training young people to do a couple things that I think is very bad for them and for society. So one is we're training young people to see people in terms of their categories, and I think this is just the wrong thing to do. So if we should be reducing the degree which we see each other as members of a category, and so we're hypersensitizing this tribal instinct, which is trouble to begin with.

And then we're telling people, we're teaching people to find ever smaller amounts of injustice wherever they can, so they're in a perpetual state of outrage. And we're teaching them then that America is an eternally racist, homophobic, etc. nation.

Now, it's never perfect, but boy are things getting better. Decade by decade, things are getting amazingly better. But many young people don't seem to know that because they're taught that the racism and the other problems are so deep.

And so this is the kind of identity politics that I find alarming, which is where these tribal creatures that are not good at finding the truth, where once we're emotional, we're able to, we accept the reasons for that. And we attack the other side. And so I see the kind of identity politics that is not about solving injustice and being magnanimous and loving towards your enemies, but rather is about getting people perpetually in a state of anger and outrage, and then demonizing your opponents.

And where I'm finding this in the intellectual debate is when I have made arguments about the bad effects of a culture of protecting young people, in the "Calding the American Mind" article, there's been almost no argument that has engaged with what I said. Most of the argument online has been, "Oh, well, you're a white male. Of course, you're protecting your privilege." In other words, identity politics has become a way that young people are taught to not engage in arguments where you can win or lose.

It's a way of invalidating your opponent by linking them usually to racism. So Mark Lilla had this really powerful "S" in the New York Times, and one of his Columbia colleagues wrote right back in some major journal. I can't remember how she put it, but she basically linked him to the, you know, you take off his, you know, basically he's a KKK.

He's like something. So it's, and as he says, this is a slur, not an argument. So I'm afraid that identity politics is teaching young people at our top universities to make slurs, and it's preventing them from learning how to make the kinds of arguments that are needed in a democratic society where we win by convincing not by force and intimidation.

So now I have a few questions specific to each of you. So to Tim, how can the tyranny of majority be prevented in a society whose moral framework is determined by vote? Well, that's actually a great question, and it is, I think Alan Dershowitz was right when he said that if you believe in human rights and inherent human dignity, and he's also right in saying it's something that is not created by the majority. It's got to be something that's just there.

Now he admits, you know, is that an atheist Jewish guy who doesn't believe in the supernatural transcendent. He has trouble giving an account for it. I mean, he actually says at one point, he says, you know, Martin Luther King Jr., who, the letter from Birmingham, jail, you know, invoking the image of God in every human being, it just, it's neater, it feels better, but he doesn't really have a good way of accounting for it.

But he said, we better agree on that. He said, if you have a society in which we agree in inherent human dignity and human rights, even though we may argue about what those rights are, at least you've got a, he says you have a weapon against the majority. You have a weapon against the majority saying 52% of us vote to kill, 48% of you, and we win.

And he said, as long as you don't have any understanding of human rights, then you could do that. But if you have that understanding of human rights, and here, I mean, I know that what I'm about to say is arguable, but people like Larry Seedantop and people like that, the recent book, The Inventing of the Invention of the Individual, there really is a lot of overlap between Christians and Jews and atheists and secular people on this idea of human rights. You know, Nietzsche would actually say, and maybe, I know, a lot, a atheist friend's hated when he says this, he says, if you actually do believe in human rights and the equality of all human beings, you're still a Christian whether you know it or not.

Because he says, there is no good empirical basis for it. And basically, it's a holdover from your Christian past or your Jewish past. And I know a lot of atheist friends do not like what Nietzsche says that, but I actually am convinced that I do think that the roots of the idea behind human rights comes from the Bible, and it's become secularized.

And you can disagree with that or not. The fact is that there would be a whole lot of overlapping consensus about human rights. Overlapping consensus from people who are Orthodox Jews and Christians, Muslims, I don't know enough to know, frankly, I'll just say, or Buddhist, I don't know enough to know.

But I'd love to go in and say, do you have the resources behind this? But it would seem like there would be an awful lot of people in this country who could agree on human rights. And that's the main way you can deal with the majoritarian tyranny, which is the big problem, that's what Dershowitz says. On a related note, John, with what do you measure morality? So for Christians, their moral compass comes from the Bible.

But if atheists don't have that, what do they use as their moral compass? So I think the deepest question in moral philosophy is the question of moral realism. Are moral claims real? If we say that men and women should have equal political rights? Is that a fact or is that just my opinion? And most people, we're sort of natural moral realists. We tend to think that moral truths are, it's just a fact.

It's just, you know, this is obviously true, and if you deny it, so we tend towards moral realism. And so Sam Harris, the new atheist, has a book called "The Moral Landscape" in which he takes a secular view of moral realism, that we can derive moral truths from science, and because, you know, things that make people happy, make them good feelings, that's good, and we can measure it in the brain. So there are a variety of forms of moral realism.

I am not a moral realist in that sense. The alternative is moral relativism. Oh, well, you know, that's ridiculous, therefore, morality, just whatever.

You know, it's subjective. I mean, I, you know, I like coffee, you like tea, I like human rights, and you like mass murder. I mean, it's just, you know, who's to say? Who's to say? Okay, so that's also a position that many people find deeply offensive and humorous as I do too.

So what's the alternative? And I think there is. I am an emergentist. What that means is that there are many different kinds of facts.

There are some facts that emerge from the interactions of people. So I'm going to make a statement. Gold is more valuable than silver.

Now, is that a fact? Or is that just my opinion? What do you think? It's a fact, but it's not a fact, a universally true fact across the universe, wherever you find intelligent life, they will agree. No. Gold is more valuable than silver.

That is not my opinion. That is a fact. But it is a fact that emerges as people trade, move around, markets create these facts.

There are a lot of these facts. So our idea is about political rights. We have certain ideas now.

If one were to say that your gender was in any way a bar from holding political office, this is incredibly offensive. Now, if someone said that in ancient Rome, or if someone said that 10,000 years ago, were they just wrong? Was that just wrong? Or do political rights grow out of our interactions such that if the basic unit of the polity is they family with a division of labor within it, well, then the idea of a gender, you know, gender political rights is not obviously crazy. Whereas today, it's obviously crazy.

So what I'm saying is the way that we live together, because of our human nature and

our inevitable creation of culture, if we interact, we will create a culture. If we trade with each other, we will create a market with prices. So moral facts emerge from our interaction.

And I think atheists are human beings like everyone else. I certainly think I'm a moral creature like everyone else. So yeah, we have a moral compass and it emerges from our interaction.

I bet you disagree with that. Yeah, it does sound like moral relativism, but let's not go there. I mean, man, I'd love to have a conversation with you about it.

Second longest moral conversation after the evil and the evil. Yeah, no, it's also actually what Dershowitz did. Even though he wrote the book quite a long time ago, that's basically what he said, why he can say human rights are real, and they're there, even though he didn't.

They're emergent, I'd say. That's right. That's what he would say too.

Okay, for our last question, there are several comments around this idea of assimilation and how it seems like there might be differing definitions of that. So what is it again, what would an assimilated American identity look like? And John, in particular, there's references to how you mentioned in the past, there was an idea of a positive pluralistic society. And so what would that look like today? Okay, so these are these are the sorts of really hard issues to work out when you get to the details.

So I'll just start exploring it. I'll just put a few things out there. So for one thing, whatever you want to do at home, however you want to cook your food, all that is great.

Now it becomes more difficult when you have social practices that put restraints on your daughters. Those are difficult issues to work out, and I can't give you a blanket answer on that. But you try to work them out.

You try to be as light handed as possible. When France put on the Burkini ban, I think the view in America was, what the hell are they doing? So there's a kind of a harsh assimilation which says, you must look like us and act like us. You're not welcome here until you do everything like us.

Now that's not the American way of assimilation, and that's not a positive or welcoming way. In America we are blessed by the fact that if you are conservative, what you're conserving is this tradition of being a nation of the nation's identity. Of being a nation of immigrants.

Of being able to bring in first Catholics and then Jews and then non-Judeo Christians. So it does say that we have certain, we do hold certain values in common. And so democracy, equal opportunity.

Now maybe American exceptionalism, only in the sense that America, there are many great and wonderful things about America. Not that it is blemish, of course it is not. Our original sin of slavery is forever a huge stain.

So you acknowledge that honestly. But the idea that we treat the country, so there are certain forms of patriotism that are open and welcoming in America. Now there are other forms of patriotism that are based on blood and soil or your race, your genes.

Those are profoundly un-American and that's what we're seeing a resurgence of on the right. That's just a few general points. The simulation often feels like a dirty word because it seems to be saying, "Oh, you know, some people could say it's cultural genocide.

If you come here and adopt American culture, we're going to kill your culture." I understand the sentiment behind that, but the alternative, if you don't have a simulation, if you say, "Come here, bring your culture, bring your language, we'll all just live near each other and we'll try to work it out," the alternative is you have no more centripetal forces. You can expect rising distrust, you can expect declining social capital and eventually democracy will fail. Thank you for listening to this podcast episode from the Veritas Forum event archives.

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(gentle music)