

[Transcript] Lex Fridman Podcast / #360 - Tim Urban: Wokeism, Cancel Culture, Social Justice, Marxism & Liberalism

The following is a conversation with Tim Urban, his second time in the podcast.

He's the author and illustrator of the amazing blog called Wait But Why, and is the author of a new book coming out tomorrow called What's Our Problem, a self-help book for societies. We talk a lot about this book in this podcast, but you really do need to get it and experience it for yourself. It is a fearless, insightful, hilarious, and I think important book in this divisive time that we live in. The Kindle version, the audiobook, and the web version should be all available on date of publication. I should also mention that my face might be a bit more beat up than usual. I got hit in the chin pretty good since I've been getting back into training jujitsu, a sport I love very much, after recovering from an injury. So if you see marks on my face during these intros or conversations, you know that my life is in a pretty good place. And now a quick few seconds mention of each sponsor. Check them out in the description. It's the best way to support this podcast. We got House of Macadamias for healthy snacks, indeed for hiring excellent teams, and Athletic Greens for health. Choose wisely, my friends. Also, if you want to work with our amazing team or always hiring, go to lexfreedman.com slash hiring. And now onto the full ad reads. As always, no ads in the middle. I try to make this interesting, but if you must skip them, please still check out our sponsors. I enjoy their stuff. Maybe you will too. This show is brought to you by a sponsor that brings a smile to my face. House of Macadamias, a company that ships delicious, high quality and healthy macadamia

nuts directly to your door. The snacks that these guys make are delicious. And they're in small portion. I can share it with guests. I can share with friends when they come over. And I feel like a normal adult. I feel like an adult because an adult can moderate their intake of snacks. I need my snacks portion perfectly. Because otherwise, if you have like a giant jar of like macadamia nuts, they're too delicious. They're too good. So the fact that they're segmented perfectly for you is really nice. Whether it's bars or whole nuts, it's a variety of deliciousness that brings joy to my life. And I really love it. Go to houseofmacadamias.com slash lex to get 20% off your order for every order, not just the first. You, the listener, will also get four ounce bag of macadamias. When you order three or more boxes of any macadamia product, that's houseofmacadamias.com slash lex. This show is also brought to you by indeed a hiring website. Like I mentioned, we're hiring and you should be using the best tools for the job when you do that because friends, there's nothing more important than the people you surround yourself with. And I'm going to go bro science for a second and pull out a random statistic. I remember reading an article yesterday about the amount of time that an average American spends in their workplace across different roles and positions and industries and so on. I don't remember what the number is, but it was tremendous. It was huge. So like those hours are really important. It's really important not just for the productivity and the success of a company, but just for your happiness, for your fulfillment. And so to me, that's what hiring is. It's like building up a team of awesome people that make each other better and you should use the best tools for the job. I certainly use Indeed. It's amazing. Indeed knows when you're growing your own business, every dollar counts. That's why with Indeed, you only pay for quality applications that match your job requirements. Visit indeed.com slash lux to start hiring now. That's indeed.com slash lux terms and conditions apply. This show is also brought to you by athletic greens and his AG1 drink,

which is an all in one daily drink to support better health and peak performance. It replaced the multivitamin for me. It replaced so much for me and it gave me so much. In fact, right after I'm done saying the words I'm saying now, I'm walking over to the fridge, which is where I made an AG1 drink that's now cold. I'm going to open the container and I'm going to consume the deliciousness knowing that my nutritional basis is taken care of. There's certain things in life that if you take care of them, they give you the freedom to take on anything in any way you want. Just knowing that when I take care of the quote unquote adult stuff, I'm free to be a child basically, which is to explore the world, to follow my curiosity, to take big risks, to be fearless, but also to be joyful, all of that. And to me, it's kind of the nutrition side of that is athletic greens help me with that. I also take electrolytes that really helps. And fish oil as well, but that's pretty much about it. Oh yeah, drink a lot of water, of course. Anyway, they'll give you one month supply of fish oil when you sign up at [athleticgreens.com slash Lex](https://athleticgreens.com/slash/Lex). This is the Lex Friedman podcast. To support it, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, dear friends, here's Tim Urban. You wrote an incredible book called *What's Our Problem*, a self-help book for societies. In the beginning, you present this view of human history as a thousand page book where each page is 250 years. And it's a brilliant visualization because almost nothing happens for most of it. So what blows your mind most about that visualization when you just sit back and think about it? It's a boring book. So 950 pages, 95% of the book, hunter-gatherers kind of doing their thing. I'm sure there's obviously some major cognitive advancements along the way in language. And I'm sure the bow and arrow comes around at some point. So tiny things, but it's like, okay, now we have 400 pages till the next thing. But then you get to page 950 and things start moving. Recorded history starts at 976. So basically the bottom row is when anything interesting happens, there's a bunch of agriculture for a while before we know anything about it. And then recorded history starts. 25 pages of actual recorded history. So when we think of prehistoric, we're talking about pages 1 through 975 of the book. And then history is page 976 to 1000. If you were reading the book, it would be like epilogue AD, the last little 10 pages of the book. And we think of AD is super long, right? 2000 years, the Roman Empire 2000 years ago. Like that's so long. Yeah. Human history has been going on for over 2000 centuries. Like that is, it's just, it's hard to wrap your head around. And this is, I mean, even that's just the end of a very long road. Like, you know, the 100,000 years before that, it's not like, you know, it's not like that was that different. So it's just, there's been people like us that have emotions like us, that have physical sensations like us for so, so long. And who are they all? And what was their life like? And it's, you know, I think we have no idea what it was like to be them. The thing that's craziest about the people of the far past is not just that they had different lives, they had different fears, they had different dangers and different responsibilities and they lived in tribes and everything, but they didn't know anything. Like, we just take it for granted that we're born on top of this tower of knowledge. And from the very beginning, we, we know that the earth is a ball floating in space. And we know that we're going to die one day. And we know that, you know, we evolved from animals and all the, those were all like incredible, you know, epiphanies quite recently. And the people a long time ago, they just had no idea what was going on. And like, I'm kind of jealous because I feel like it, I mean, it might have been scary to not know what's going on, but it also, I feel like

would be, you'd have a sense of awe and wonder all the time. And, and you don't know what's going to happen next. And it's, once you learn, you're kind of like, oh, that's like, it's a little grim. But they probably had the same capacity for consciousness to experience the world, to wander about the world, maybe to construct narratives about the world and myths and so on. They just had less grounded systematic facts to play with. They still probably felt the narratives, the myths that constructed as intensely as we do.

Oh yeah. They also fell in love. They also had friends and they had falling outs with friends. They didn't shower much though. No, they did not smell nice.

Maybe they did. Maybe beauty's in the high of the beholden. Maybe it's all like relative.

So how many people in history have experienced a hot shower? Like almost none. That's like, one more hot shower was invented 100 years ago, like less. So like George Washington never had a hot shower. It's like, it's just kind of weird. Like he took cold showers all the time or like.

And again, we just take this for granted, but that's like an unbelievable life experience to have a controlled little booth where it rains hot water on your head. And then you get out and it's not everywhere. It's like contained. That was like, you know, a lot of people probably lived and died with never experiencing hot water. Maybe they had a way to heat water over a fire, but like then it's, I don't know, it's just like, there's so many things about our lives now that are completely, just total anomaly. It makes me wonder like, what is the thing they would notice the most? I mean, the sewage system, like it doesn't smell in cities. What does the sewer system do? I mean, it gets rid of waste efficiently, etc. We don't have to confront it, both with our, with any of our senses. And that's probably wasn't there. I mean, what else? Plus all the medical stuff associated with sewage. Yeah. I mean, how about the disease? Yeah. How about the cockroaches

and the rats and the disease and the plagues and, you know, and then when they got, so they caught more diseases, but then when they caught the disease, they also didn't have treatment for it.

So they often would die or they would just be in a huge amount of pain. They also didn't know what the disease was. They didn't know about microbes. That was this new thing, the idea that these tiny little animals that are causing these diseases. So what did they think, you know, in the, the bubonic plague, you know, in the Black Death, the 1300s, people thought that it was an act of God, because, you know, God's angry at us. Because why would, you know, why would you not think that if you didn't know what it was? And so the crazy thing is that these were the same primates. So I do know something about them. I know, in some sense, what it's like to be them, because I am a human as well. And to know that this particular primate, that I know what it's like to be, experienced such different things. It's, and like this isn't, our life is not the life that this primate has experienced almost ever. So it's just, it's just a bit strange.

I don't know. I have a sense that we would get acclimated very quickly. Like if we threw ourselves back a few thousand years ago, it would be very uncomfortable at first. But the whole hot shower thing, you'll get used to it after a year. You would not even like miss it. Because there's a few, trying to remember which book that talks about hiking the Appalachian Trail. But you kind of miss those hot showers. But I have a sense like after a few months, after a few years.

Well, you used your skill recalibrates. Yeah. Yeah. I was saying the other day to a friend that whatever you used to, you start to think that, oh, that the people that have more than me are more fortunate. Like, it just sounds incredible. I would be so happy. But you know,

that's not true. Because you experience what would happen is you would, you would, you would get these

new things or you would, you would get these new opportunities and then you would get used to it. And then you would this, the hedonic treadmill, you'd come back to where you are. And likewise, though, because you think, oh my God, what if I had to, you know, have this kind of job that I never would want or I had this kind of marriage that I never would want. You know what, if you did, you would adjust and you get used to it and you might not be that much less happy than you are now.

So on the other side of the, you being okay going back, you know, you, we would survive if we had to go back. You know, we'd have to learn some skills and, but, but we would buck up and, you know, people have gone to war before that we're in the shopkeepers a year before that they were in the trenches the next year. But on the other hand, if you brought them here, you know, I always think it'd be so fun to just bring, forget the hunter gatherers, bring a 1700s person here and tour them around, take them on an airplane and show them your phone and all the things it can do, show them the internet, show them the grocery store, imagine taking them to a Whole Foods.

Likewise, I think they would be completely awestruck and on their knees crying tears of joy.

And then they'd get used to it and they'd be complaining about like, you know, you don't have the oranges in stock is like, you know, and that's the grocery store is a tough one to get used to. Like when I, when I first came to this country, the, the abundance of bananas was the thing that struck me the most or like fruits in general, but food in general, but bananas somehow struck me the most that you could just eat them as much as you want. And that took a long time for me, probably took several years to really get acclimated to that. Is that

why didn't you have bananas? The number of bananas, fresh bananas, I don't,

that wasn't available. Bread, yes, bananas, no. Yeah, it's like, we don't even know what to like, we don't even know the proper levels of gratitude. You know, walking around the grocery store, I don't know to be like, the bread's nice, but the bananas are like, we're so lucky. I don't know. I'm like, oh, I could have been the other way. I have no idea.

Well, it's interesting then where we point our gratitude in the West, in the United States.

Probably, do we point it away from materialist possessions towards, or do we just aspire that to do that towards other human beings that we love? Because in the East and the Soviet Union, growing up poor is having food is the gratitude. Having transportation is gratitude. Having warmth and shelter is gratitude. And now, but see, within that, the deep gratitude is for other human beings. It's the penguins huddling together for warmth in the cold. I think it's a person-by-person basis. I mean, I'm sure, yes, of course, in the West, people on average feel gratitude towards different things, or maybe a different level of gratitude. Maybe we feel less gratitude than countries that, obviously, I think the easiest, the person that's most likely to feel gratitude is going to be someone whose life happens to be one where they just move up, up, up throughout their life. A lot of people in the greatest generation, people who were born in the 20s or whatever, and a lot of the boomers too. This story is the greatest generation grew up dirt poor, and they often ended up middle class. And the boomers, some of them started off middle class, and many of them ended up quite wealthy. And I feel like that life trajectory is naturally going to foster gratitude, right? Because you're not going to take for granted these things because you didn't have them. I didn't go out of the country really in my childhood

very much. We traveled, but it was to Virginia to see my grandparents or Wisconsin to see other relatives or maybe Florida after we were going out to the beach. And then I started going out of the country like crazy in my 20s because I really became my favorite thing. And I feel like because I, if I had grown up always doing that, it would have been another thing. I'm like, yeah, it's just something I do. But I still, every time I go to a new country, I'm like, oh my God, this is so cool. I'm in another country. This thing I've only seen on the map. I'm like, I'm there now. And so I feel like it's a lot of times it's a product of what you didn't have, and then you suddenly had. But I still think it's case by case in that there's a meter in everyone's head that I think at a 10, you're experiencing just immense gratitude, which is a euphoric feeling. It's a great feeling. And it makes you happy. It's to savor what you have, to look down at the mountain of stuff that you have that you're standing on, to look down at and say, oh my God, I'm so lucky. And I'm so grateful for this and this and this. And obviously, that's a happy exercise. Now, when you move the meter down to six or seven, maybe you think that sometimes, but you're not always thinking that because you're sometimes looking up at this cloud of things that you don't have and the things that they have, but you don't or the things you wished you had or you thought you were going to have or whatever. And that's the opposite direction

to look. And that's either that's envy, that's yearning, or often it's if you think about your past, it's grievance. And so then you go into a one and you have someone who feels like a complete victim. They are just a victim of the society, of their siblings and their parents and their loved one. And they are wallowing in everything that's happened wrong to me, everything I should have that I don't, everything that has gone wrong for me. And so that's a very unhealthy, mentally unhealthy place to be. Anyone can go there. There's an endless list of stuff it can be aggrieved about and an endless list of stuff you can have gratitude for. And so in some ways, it's a choice and it's a habit. And maybe it's part of how we were raised or our natural demeanor, but it's such a good exercise. You are really good at this, by the way. Your Twitter is like, go on. Well, you're constantly just saying, man, I'm lucky. Or like, I'm so grateful for this. And it's a good thing to do because you're reminding yourself, but you're also reminding other people to think that way. And it's like, we are lucky. And so anyway, I think that scale can go from one to 10. And I think it's hard to be a 10. I think you'd be very happy if you could be. But I think trying to be above a five and looking down at the things you have more often than you are looking up at the things you don't or being resentful about the things that people have wronged you. Well, the interesting thing, I think, was an open question, but I suspect that you can control that knob for the individual. Like you yourself can choose, it's like the Stoic philosophy, you could choose where you are as a matter of habit, like you said. But you can also probably control that on the scale of a family, of a tribe, of a nation, of a society. I mean, a lot, you can describe a lot of the things that happens in Nazi Germany and different other parts of history through a sort of societal envy and resentment that builds up. Maybe certain narratives pick up and then they infiltrate your mind. And then now your knob goes to, from the gratitude for everything, it goes to resentment and envy and all that. Germany between the two world wars, you know, like you said, the Soviet mentality. So yeah, and then when you're soaking in a culture, so there's this kind of two factors, right? It's what's going on in your own head and then

what's surrounding you. And what's surrounding you kind of has concentric circles. There's your immediate group of people, because that group of people, if they're a certain way, they feel a lot of gratitude and they talk about it a lot, that kind of insulates you from the broader culture, because people are going to have the most impact on you or the ones closest. But often, all the concentric circles are saying the same thing, that people around you or are feeling the same way that the broader community, which is feeling the same way as the broader country. And I think this is why I think American patriotism, you know, nationalism, can be tribal, it can be very, not a good thing. Patriotism, I think is a great thing, because really, what is patriotism? I mean, if you love your country, you should love your fellow countrymen. Patriotism is like, I think a feeling of unity, but it also comes along with an implicit kind of concept of gratitude, because it's like, we are so lucky to live in, people think it's so venous to say, we live in the best country in the world, right? And yes, when Americans say that, no one likes it, right? But actually, it's not a bad thing to think. It's a nice thing to think. It's a way of saying, I'm so grateful for all the great things this country gives to me and this country has done. And I think, you know, if you heard a Filipino person say, you know what, the Philippines is the best country in the world, no one in America would say that's chauvinist. They'd say, awesome, right? Because when it's coming from someone who's not American, it sounds totally fine. But I think national pride is actually good. Now, again, that can quickly translate into xenophobia and nationalism. And so, you have to make sure it doesn't go off that cliff. But yeah, there's good ways to formulate that. Like you talk about, we'll talk about like high rung progressivism, high rung conservatism. Those are two different ways of embodying patriotism. So you could talk about maybe loving the tradition that this country stands for, or you could talk about loving the people that ultimately push progress. And those

are, from an intellectual perspective, a good way to represent patriotism. We've got to zoom out, because this graphic is epic. A lot of images in your book are just epic on their own. It's brilliantly done. But this one has famous people for each of the cards, like the best of. Yeah. And by the way, good for them to be the person that, it's not that I could have chosen lots of people for each card, but I think most people would agree, you know, that's a pretty fair choice for each page. And good for them to be, you know, you crushed it if you can be the person for your whole 250 year page. So. Well, I noticed you put Gandhi, didn't put Hitler. I mean, there's a lot of people going to argue with you about that particular last page. True. Yes, you're right. I could have put in, I actually, I was thinking about Darwin there too. Darwin, Einstein. Yeah, exactly. You really could have put anyone. You think about putting yourself for a second? Yeah, I should have. I should have. That would have been awesome. I'm sure that would have endeared the readers to me from right from the beginning of the first page of the book.

A little bit of a messianic complex going on. But yeah, so the list of people, just so you know, so these are 250 year chunks. The last one being from 1770 to 2020. And so it goes, Gandhi, Shakespeare, Joan of Arc, Jankis Khan, Charlemagne, Muhammad, Constantine, Jesus, Cleopatra, Aristotle, Buddha. That's so interesting to think about this very recent human history. That's 11 pages. So it would be 2750, almost 3000 years. Just that there's these figures that stand out and then define the course of human history. And it's like the crazy, the craziest thing to me is that like Buddha was a dude. He was a guy with like arms and legs and fingernails that he

may be bit and like he likes certain foods. And maybe he got like, you know, he had like digestive issues sometimes and like he got cuts and they stung. And like he was a guy and he had hopes and dreams and he probably had a big ego for a while before he, I guess Buddha totally overcame that one. But like, and it's like, who knows, you know, what the myth, the mythical figure of Buddha, who knows how similar he was. But the fact, same with Jesus, like this was a good guy. Like to me, it's he's a primate. What impact? He was a cell first and then a baby. Yeah. And he was a fetus at some point. A dumb baby trying to learn how to walk. Yeah. Like having a tantrum. Yeah. Because he's frustrated because he's in the terrible twos. Jesus was in the terrible twos. Buddha never had a tantrum. Let's be honest. The myth. The mother was like, this baby is great. Wow. Figure something out. It just, I mean, this, I mean, listen, learning about Genghis Khan, it's incredible to me because it's just like, this was some Mongolian, you know, herder guy who was taken as a slave and he was like dirt poor, you know, catching rats, is it, you know, young teen with, you know, to feed him and his mom and his, I think his brother. And it's just like, the odds on when he was born, he was just one of, you know, probably tens of thousands of random teen boys living in Mongolia in the 1200s. The odds of that person, any one of them being a household name today that we're talking about, it's just crazy, like what had to happen. And it's for that guy to, for that poor, dirt poor herder to take over the world. I don't know. So history just like continually blows my mind. Like, you know. And he's the reason you and I are related, probably. Yeah, no, I mean, it's also that's the other thing is that some of these dudes, by becoming king, by being, having a better army at the right time, you know, William the Conqueror, whatever has, is in the right place at the right time with the right army, you know, and there's a weakness at the right moment and he comes over and he exploits it and ends up probably having, you know, I don't know, 1000 children. And those children are high up people who maybe have a ton of, the species is different now because of him. Like if that, forget England's different or, you know, European borders look different. Like, like we are, like we look different because of a small handful of people, you know, certain when I sometimes I think I'm like, Oh, you know, this part of the world, I can recognize someone's Greek, you know, someone's Persian, someone's wherever, because, you know, they kind of have certain facial features. And I'm like, it may have happened. I mean, obviously, it's that that's a population, but it may be that like someone 600 years ago that looked like that really spread their seed. And that's why the ethnicity looks kind of like that. Yeah. Yeah. Do you think individuals like that can turn the direction of history? Or is that an illusion that narrative we tell ourselves? Well, it's both. I mean, so I said that William the Conqueror, right, or Hitler, right? It's not that Hitler was born and destined to be great at all, right? I think in a lot of cases, he's some frustrated artist with a temper who's turning over the table in his studio and hitting his wife and being kind of a dick and a total nobody, right? I think almost all the times you could have put Hitler baby on earth. He's a he's a rando, right? You know, and maybe he's a, you know, maybe sometimes he becomes a, you know, some kind of, you know, he uses the speaking ability because that ability was going to be there either way. But maybe he uses it for

something else. But, but that said, I also do, I think you, but it's not that World War II was going to happen either way, right? So it's both. It's that like these circumstances were one way and this person came along at the right time and those two made a match made in this case hell. But he makes you wonder, yes, it's a match in hell, but are there other people that could have taken his place or do these people that stand out? They're the rarest spark of that genius, whether it take us towards evil, towards good, whether those figures singularly define the trajectory of humanity. You know, what defines the trajectory of humanity in the 21st century, for example, might be the influence of AI, might be the influence of nuclear war, negative or positive,

not in the case of nuclear war, but the bioengineering, nanotech, virology, what else is there? Maybe the structure of governments and so on. Maybe the structure of universities. I don't know. There could be singular figures that stand up and lead the way for human. But I wonder if the society is the thing that manifests that person or that person really does have a huge impact. I think it's probably a spectrum where there are some cases when a circumstance was such that something like what happened was going to happen. If you pluck that person from the earth, I don't know whether the Mongols is a good example or not, but maybe it could be that if you plucked

Genghis Khan as a baby, there was because of the specific way Chinese civilization was at that time and the specific climate that was causing a certain kind of pressure on the Mongols and the way they still had their great archers and they had their horses and they had a lot of the same advantages. So maybe it was like, it was waiting to happen, right? It was going to happen either way and might not have happened to the extent or whatever. So maybe or you could go the full other direction and say, actually, this was probably not going to happen. And I think World War II is an example where I kind of think World War II really was kind of the work of, of course, it relied on all these other circumstances. You had to have the resentment in Germany. You have to have the Great

Depression. But like, I think if you take Hitler out, I'm pretty sure World War I, World War II doesn't happen. Well, then it seems like easier to answer these questions when you look at history, even recent history, but let's look at now. Let's look at, I'm sure we'll talk about social media. So who are the key players in social media? Mark Zuckerberg. What's the name of the MySpace guy? Tom? Tom, just Tom, yeah. There's a meme going around where like MySpace is like the perfect social media because no algorithmic involvement. Everybody's happy and positive. Also, Tom did it right. At the time, we were like, oh man, Tom only made like a few million dollars.

Oh, he sucks to not be suck. Tom might be living a nice life right now where he doesn't have this nightmare that these other people have. Yeah. And he's always smiling, his profile pic.

And so there's like Larry Page, so with Google, that's kind of intermingled into that whole thing, into the development of the internet. Jack Dorsey now, Elon. Who else? I mean, there's people playing

with the evolution of social media. And to me, that seems to be connected to the development of AI. And it seems like those singular figures will define the direction of AI development and social media development with social media seeming to have such a huge impact on our collective

intelligence. It does feel in one way like individuals have an especially big impact right

now in that a small number of people are pulling some big levers. And there can be a little meeting of three people at Facebook, and they come out of that meeting and make a decision that totally changes the world. On the other hand, you see a lot of conformity. You see a lot of, they all pulled the plug on Trump the same day. So that suggests that there's some bigger force that is also kind of driving them, in which case it's less about the individuals. I think, you know, this is, you know, what is leadership, right? I mean, to me, leadership is the ability to move things in a direction that the cultural forces are not already taking things, right? A lot of times people seem like a leader because they're just kind of hopping on the cultural wave and they happen to be the person who gets to the top of it. Now it seems like they're, but actually the wave was already going. Like real leadership is when someone actually changes the wave, changes the shape of the wave. Like I think Elon with, you know, SpaceX and with Tesla, like genuinely like shaped a wave. You know, maybe you could say that EVs were actually, like they were going to happen anyway, but it's not much evidence about at least happening when it did. You know, if we end up on Mars, you know, you can say that Elon was a genuine like leader there. And so there are examples now, like Zuckerberg definitely has done a lot of leadership along the way. He's also potentially kind of like caught in a storm that is happening and, you know, he's one of the figures in it. So I don't know. And it's possible that he is a big shaper if the metaverse becomes a reality. If in 30 years we're all living in a virtual world, to many people, it seems ridiculous now that that was a poor investment. Well, he talked about getting, you know, 10, you know, I think it was something like a billion people with a VR headset in their pocket in my, you know, I think it was 10 years from now back in 2015. So we're behind that. But when he was talking about that, and honestly, I, this is something I've been wrong about, because I went to like one of the Facebook conferences and tried out all the new Oculus stuff. And I was like, you know, pretty early talking to some of the, you know, major players there, because I was going to write a big post about it that then got swallowed by this book. But, but I would have been wrong in the post, because in what I would have said was that this thing is, you know, when I tried it, I was like, this is, you know, some of them are suck, some of them make you nauseous, and they're just not that you're, you know, the headsets were big. And, you know, but I was like, the times when this is good, it is, I have this feeling I haven't had, it reminds me of the feeling I had when I first was five, and I went to a friend's house and he had Nintendo. And I, and he gave me the controller, and I was looking at the screen and I pressed a button and Mario jumped. And I said, I said, I can make the something on the screen move. And the same feeling I had the first time someone showed me how to send an email, it was like really early, and he's like, you can send this. And I was like, it goes, I can press enter on my computer and something happens on your computer. Those were obviously, you know, when you have that feeling, it often means you're, you're witnessing a paradigm shift. And I thought this is one of those things. And I still kind of think it is, but it's kind of weird that it hasn't, you know, like, where's the VR revolution? Like, yeah, I'm surprised because I'm with you. My first and still instinct is, this feels like it changes everything. VR feels like it changes everything, but it's not changing anything. Like a dumb part of my brain is genuinely convinced that this is real. And then the smart part knows it's not. But that's why the dumb part was like, we're not walking off that cliff. The smart part's like, you're on your rug. It's fine. The dumb part of my brain is like,

I'm not walking off the cliff. So it's like, it's crazy.

I feel like it's waiting for like that revolutionary person who comes in and says,

I'm going to create a headset. Like honestly, Steve Jobs iPhone of honestly, a little bit of a Karmak type guy, which is why it was really interesting for him to be involved with Facebook is basically how do we create a simple dumb thing that's a hundred bucks, but actually creates that experience. And then there's going to be some viral killer app on it. And that's going to be the gateway into a thing that's going to change everything.

I mean, I don't know what exactly was the thing that changed everything with the personal computer.

Does that understood why that maybe graphics? What was the use case? I mean, exactly.

It wasn't the 84 Macintosh like a moment when it was like, this is actually something that normal people can and want to use. Because it was less than \$5,000, I think.

And I just think it had some like Steve Jobs user friendliness already to it that other ones it hadn't had. I think Windows 95 was a really big deal. I remember like, because I'm old enough to remember the MS-DOS when I was like kind of remember the command. And then suddenly this concept of like a window you drag something into or you double click an icon, which now seems like so obvious to us was like revolutionary because it made it intuitive. So I don't know. Windows 95 was good. It was crazy. I forget what the big leaps was because as Windows 2000, it sucked. And then Windows XP was good. I moved to Mac around

2004. So I sold your soul to the devil. I see. Well, us, the people still use Windows and Android, the device and the operating system of the people, not you elitist folk with your books and your what else and success. Okay. You write more technology means better good times, but it also means bad or bad times. And the scary thing is, if the good and bad keep exponentially growing, it doesn't matter how great the good times become. If the bad gets to a certain

level of bad, it's all over for us. Can you elaborate on this? Why is there? Why does the bad have that property that if it's all exponentially getting more powerful, then the bad is going to win in the end? Is my misinterpreting that? No. So the first thing is I noticed a trend, which was like the good is getting better every century. Like the 20th century was the best century yet in terms of prosperity, in terms of GDP per capita, in terms of life expectancy, in terms of poverty and disease and every metric that matters. The 20th century was incredible. It also had the biggest wars in history, the biggest genocide in history, the biggest existential threat yet with nuclear weapons. The depression was probably as big and economic. So it's this interesting thing where the stakes are getting higher in both directions. And so the question is, if you get enough good, does that protect you against the bad? The dream, and I do think this is possible too, is the good gets so good. Have you ever read the culture series that Ian Banks books? Not yet, but I get criticized on a daily basis by some of the mutual folks we know for not having done so. Lots of. And I feel like a lesser man for it. Yes, I need to change.

So that's how I got onto it. And I read six of the 10 books, and they're great. But the thing I love about them is it just paints one of these futuristic societies where the good has gotten so good that the bad is no longer even an issue. Basically, and the way that this works is the AIs are benevolent, and they control everything. And so there's one random anecdote where they're

like, what happens if you murder someone? Because there's still people with rage and jealousy or whatever. So someone murders someone. First of all, that person's backed up. So it's like they have to get a new body, and it's annoying, but it's not death. And secondly, that person, what are they going to do? Put them in jail? No, no, no. They're just going to send a slap drone around, which is this little tiny random drone that just will float around next to them forever. And by the way, it would kind of be their servant. It's kind of fun to have a slap drone, but they're just making sure that they never do anything. And it's like, I was like, oh, man, it could just be, everyone could be so safe, and everything could be so like, you want a house, the AIs will build your house. There's endless space. There's endless resources. So I do think that that could be part of our future. That's part of what excites me is, like there is, like today would seem like a utopia to Thomas Jefferson, right? Thomas Jefferson's world would seem like a utopia to a caveman. There is a future. And by the way, these are happening faster, these jumps, right? So the thing that would seem like a utopia to us, we could experience in our own lifetimes, right? Like it's especially a, you know, life extension you get combines with exponential progress. I want to get there. And I think in that part of what makes it utopia is you don't have to be a scared of the worst bad guy in the world trying to do the worst damage because we have protection. But that said, I'm not sure how that happens. Like it's either easier said than done. Nick Bostrom uses the example of if nuclear weapons could be manufactured by microwaving sand, for example, we probably would be in the stone age right now because 0.001% of people would love to destroy all of humanity, right? Some 16-year-old with huge mental health problems who right now goes and shoots up a school would say, oh, even better, I'm going to blow up a city. And now suddenly there's copycats, right? And so that's like, as our technology grows, it's going to be easier for the worst bad guys to do in tremendous damage. And it's easier to destroy than to build. So it takes a tiny, tiny number of these people with enough power to do bad. So to me, I'm like, the stakes are going up because what we have to lose is this incredible utopia. But also, like, dystopia is real. It happens. The Romans ended up in a dystopia. They probably earlier thought that was never possible. Like, we should not get cocky. And so to me, that trend is the exponential tech is a double-edged sword. It's so exciting. I'm happy to be alive now overall because I'm an optimist and I find it exciting. But it's really scary. And the dumbest thing we can do is not be scared. The dumbest thing we can do is get cocky and think, well, my life is always the last couple of generations, everything's been fine. Stop that.

What's your gut? What percentage of trajectories take us towards the, as you put unimaginably good future versus unimaginably bad future? Is it like, as an optimist?

It's really hard to know. I mean, all I can, you know, one of the things we can do is look at history. And on one hand, there's a lot of stories. I'm actually listening to a great podcast right now called The Fall of Civilizations. And it's literally every episode is like, you know, a little like two hour deep dive into some civilizations. Some are really famous, like the Roman Empire, some are more obscure, like the Norse in Greenland. But each one is so interesting. But what's, it's, I mean, there's a lot of civilizations that had their peak. There's always the peak, right, when they're thriving and they're at their max size and they have their waterways and they have their civilized and there's representative and it's fair and whatever. Not always, but it's, it's, the peak is a great, you know, if I could go back in time, you know, it's not that you don't,

you know, the farther you go back, the worse it gets. No, no, no, you want to go back to a civilization during, I would go into the Roman Empire in the year a hundred. Sounds great, right? You don't want to go to the Roman Empire in the year 400. We might be in the peak right now, here, whatever this empire is. So honestly, I think about like the 80s, you know, the 70s, the 80s. Oh, here we go. The music. No, no, I hate 80s. No, the 80s culture is so annoying. It's just like, when I read, when I listen to these things, I'm thinking, you know, the 80s, the 90s, America, the 90s was popular. People forget that now. Like Clinton was a superstar around the world. Michael Jordan was exported internationally, then basketball was everywhere suddenly. You had like music, the sports, whatever. It was a little probably like the 50s, you know, you're coming out of the world war and the depression before it. It was like this kind of like everyone was in a good mood kind of time, you know, it's like a finish a big project and it's Saturday. It was like, I feel like the 50s was kind of like everyone was having, you know, the 20s after like everyone was in good mood randomly. Then the 30s, everyone was in a bad mood. But the 90s, I think we'll look back on it as a time when everyone was in a good mood. And it was like, you know, again, of course, at the time, it doesn't feel that way necessarily. But I look at that, I'm like, maybe that was kind of America's peak. And like, no, maybe not, but like it hasn't been popular since really worldwide. It's gone in and out depending on the country, but like it hasn't reached that level of like America's awesome around the world. And the political, you know, situations gotten, you know, really ugly. And, you know, maybe it's social media, maybe who knows, but I wonder if it'll ever be as simple and positive as it was then. Like maybe we are in the, you know, it feels a little like maybe we're in the beginning of the downfall or not. Because these things don't just, it's not a perfect smooth hill. It goes up and down, up and down. So maybe we're, there's another big upcoming. And it's unclear whether public opinion, which is kind of what you're talking to, is correlated strongly with influence. As you could say that even though America has been on a decline in terms of public opinion, the exporting of technology that America has still, with all the talk of China, has still been leading the way in terms of AI, in terms of social media, in terms of just basically any software related product.

Like chips.

Yeah, chips. So hardware and software, I mean, America leads the way. You could argue that Google and Microsoft and Facebook are no longer American companies, they're international companies, but they really are still at the, you know, headquartered in Silicon Valley broadly speaking. So in Tesla, of course, and just all of it's, all the technological innovation still seems to be happening in the United States. Although culturally and politically, this is not, this is not, it's not good. Well, maybe that could shift at any moment when all the technological development can actually be, create some positive impact in the world that can shift it, put the right leadership and so on, with the right messaging.

Yeah, I think, I don't feel confident at all about whether, no, no, I don't mean that. I don't mean, I don't feel confident in my opinion that we may be on the downswing or that we may be, because I truly don't know. It's like, I think that people, these are really big macro stories that are really hard to see when you're inside of them. It's like, it's like being on a beach and running around, you know, a few miles this way and trying to suss out the shape of the coastline. Like it's just really hard to see the big picture. You know, you get caught up in the micro stories, the little tiny ups and downs that are part of some bigger trend. And also,

giant paradigm shifts happen quickly nowadays. The internet, you know, came out of nowhere and suddenly was like, you know, changed everything. So there could be a change everything thing on the

way. It seems like there's a few candidates for it. And like, but, but I mean, it feels like the stakes are just high, higher than it even was for the Romans, higher than it was, were because that we were more powerful as a species. We have godlike powers with technology that other civilizations that their peak didn't have. And so I wonder if those high stakes and powers will feel laughable to people that live humans, aliens, cyborgs, whatever lives a hundred years from now, that maybe maybe are a little like this feeling of political and technological turmoil is nothing. Well, that's the big question. You could eat. So right now, you know, you know, the 1890s was like a super politically contentious decade in the US. It was like immense tribalism. And newspapers were all like lying and telling, you know, there was a lot of like what we would associate with today's media, the worst of it. And it was over gold or silver being this, I don't know, it was very, it's something that I don't understand. But the point is it was a little bit of a blip, right? It happened. It felt, it must have felt like the end of days at the time. And then now we, most people don't even know about that versus, you know, again, the Roman Empire actually collapsed. And so the question is just like, is yeah, you know, will in 50 years, will this be like, or like McCarthyism, oh, they had like, oh, that was like a crazy few years in America. And then it was fine. Or is this the beginning of something really big? And that's what? Well, I wonder if we can predict what the big thing is at the beginning. It feels like we're not, we're just here along for the ride. And at the local level. And at every level, I try to do our best. Well, how do we do our best? And what's the, that's the one thing I know for sure is that we need to have our wits about us and do our best. And the way that we can do that, you know, we have to be as wise as possible, right, to proceed forward. And wisdom is an emergent property of discourse. So you're a proponent of wisdom versus stupidity? Because you can make a, I can steal man in the case for stupidity. Do it. I probably can't. But there's some, I think wisdom, and you talk about this can come with a false confidence, arrogance. I mean, you talk about this in the book, that's too easy. That's not wisdom then. If you're being arrogant, you're being unwise. Unwise. Yeah, I think, I think wisdom is doing what people 100 years from now with the hindsight that we don't have would do if they could come back in time and they knew everything. It's like, how do we figure out how to have hindsight when we actually are not? What if stupidity is the thing that people from a hundred years from now will see as wise? I mean, the idiot by the CSK being naive and trusting everybody, maybe.

Well, then you get lucky. Then, then, then, you know, then maybe you get to a good, a good future by stumbling upon it. But ideally, you can get there. Like, I think a lot of, we, the America, the great things about it are a product of the wisdom of previous Americans. You know, the Constitution was a pretty, you know, pretty wise system to set up.

There's not much stupid stumbling around. Well, there is, I mean, with the CSKs, the idiot, Prince Mishkin and brothers Karmasov, there's Alyosha Karmasov. You are on the side of love and almost like a naive trust in other human beings. And that turns out to be, at least in my perspective, in the long term, for the success of the species is actually wisdom.

It's a compass.

But we don't know. It's a good compass.

It's a compass when you're in the fog.

In the fog.

It's a compass. Yeah.

Love is a compass.

Okay. But, but here's the thing. So I think we should have a compass is nice, but you know, what else is nice is a flashlight in the fog that can help. You can't see that far, but you can see, oh, you can see four feet ahead instead of one foot. And that to me is discourse. That is open, vigorous, like discussion in a culture that fosters that is how the species, how the American citizens as a unit can be as wise as possible, can maybe see four feet ahead instead of one foot ahead.

That said, Charles Bukowski said that love is a fog that fades with the first light of reality.

So I don't know how that works out, but I feel like there's intermixing of metaphors that works. Okay. You also write that quote as the authors of the story of us, which is this thousand page book, we have no mentors, no editors, no one to make sure it all turns out okay.

It's all in our hands. This scares me, but it's also gives me hope. If we can all get just a little wiser together, it may be enough to nudge the story onto a trajectory that points towards an unimaginably good future. Do you think we can possibly define what a good future looks like? I mean, this is the problem that we ran into with communism of thinking of utopia, of having a deep confidence about what a utopian world looks like.

Well, it's a deep confidence. That was a deep confidence about the instrumental way to get there. It was that, I think a lot of us can agree that if everyone had everything they needed and we didn't have disease or poverty and people could live as long as they wanted to and choose one to die, and there was no major existential threat because we had control.

I think almost everyone can agree that would be great. That communism is a, that was, they said, this is the way to get there. And that is, that's a different question.

You know, so the unimaginably good future I'm picturing. I think a lot of people would picture and I think most people would agree. No, not everyone. There's a lot of people out there who would say humans are the scourge on the earth and we should degrowth or something. But I think a lot of people would agree that, you know, just again, take Thomas Jefferson, bring him here.

He would see it as utopia for obvious reasons, for the medicine, the food, the transportation, just how the quality of life and the safety and all of that. So extrapolate that forward for us. Now, we were Thomas Jefferson, you know, what's the equivalent? That's what I'm talking about. And the big question is, I don't try to say here's the way to get there. Here's the actual specific way to get there. I try to say, how do we have a flashlight so that we can together figure it out? Like how do we give ourselves the best chance of figuring out the way to get there?

And I think part of the problem with communists and people is ideologues is that they're way too overconfident that they know the way to get there and it becomes a religion to them, this solution. And then, you know, you can't update once you have a solution as a religion.

And so I felt a little violated when you said communists and stared deeply into myself.

In this book, you've developed a framework for how to fix everything.

It's called The Ladder. Can you explain it? Okay, it's not a framework for how to fix everything.

I'll explain it to Tim Rubin at some point. Okay. How this humor thing works. Yeah, no.

Framework of how to think about collaboration between humans such that we could fix things.

I think it's a compass. It's like, it's like a, it's a ruler that we can, once we look at it together and see what it is, we can all say, oh, we want to go to that side of the ruler, not this side. And so it gives us a direction to go. So what are the parts of the ladder? So I have these two characters. This orange guy, this primitive mind is, this is our software. That is the software that was in a 50,000 BC person's head that was specifically optimized for to help that person survive in that world and not even, not just, not really survive, but help them pass their genes on in that world. And civilization happened quickly and brains changed slowly. And so that unchanged dude is still running the show in our head. And I use the example of like Skittles. Like, why do we eat Skittles? It's trash. It's obviously bad for you. And it's because the primitive mind in the world that it was programmed for, there was no Skittles. And it was just fruit. And, you know, and, and if there was a dense, chewy, sweet fruit like that, it meant you just found like a calorie gold mine. Energy, energy, take it, take it, eat as much as you can. Gorge on it. Hopefully you get a little fat. It would be the dream. And now we're so good with energy for a while. We don't have to stress about it anymore. So today, Mars, Inc. is clever and says, let's not sell things to people's higher minds, who's the other character. Let's sell to people's primitive minds. Primitive minds are dumb. And let's trick them into thinking this is this, this, this thing you should eat. And then they'll eat it. And now Mars, Inc. is a huge company. Actually, just to linger real quick. See, you said primitive mind and higher mind. So those are the two things that make up this bigger mind that is the modern human being. Yeah. It's like, you know, it's not perfect. Obviously, there's a lot of crossover. There's people who yell at me for saying there's two minds. And, you know, that, but to me, it's still a useful framework where you have this software that has making decisions based on a world that you're not in anymore. And then you've got this other character, I call it the higher mind. And it's the part of you that knows that skills are not good and can override the instinct. And the reason you don't always eat skittles is because the higher mind says, no, no, no, we're not doing that, because that's bad. And I know that, right? Now, you can apply that to a lot of things. The higher mind is the one that knows I shouldn't procrastinate. The primitive mind is the one that wants to conserve energy and not do anything icky and, you know, can't see the future. So he procrastinates the, you know, you can apply this. No, I in this book apply it to, to how we form our beliefs is one of the ways. And then eventually to politics and political movements. But like, if you think about what, well, what's the equivalent of the Skittles tug of war in your head for how do you form your beliefs? And it's that the primitive mind in the world that it was optimized for, it wanted to feel conviction about its beliefs. It wanted to be sure that it was wanted to feel conviction and it wanted to agree with the people around there didn't want to stand out. It wanted to, to perfectly agree with the tribe about the tribe's sacred beliefs. Right. And so there's a big part of us that wants to do that that doesn't like changing our mind. It feels like it's part of our, the primitive mind identifies with beliefs. It feels like it's a threat, a physical threat to you, to your primitive mind when you change your mind or when someone disagrees with you in a smart way. So there's that huge force in us, which is confirmation bias. That's where that comes from. It's this desire to keep believing what we believe and this desire to also fit in with our beliefs, to believe what the people around

us believe. And that can be fun in some ways. We all like the same sports team and we're all super into it and we're all going to be biased about that call together. I mean, it's not always bad, but it's not a very smart way to be. And you're actually, you're working kind of for those ideas. Those ideas are like your boss and you're working so hard to keep believing those. Those ideas are, you know, a really good paper comes in that you read that conflicts with those ideas. And you will do all this work to say that paper is bullshit because you're a faithful employee of those ideas. Now, the higher mind to me, the same party that can override the Skittles can override this and can search for something that makes a lot more sense, which is truth. Because what rational being wouldn't want to know the truth, who wants to be delusional. And so there's this tug of war because the higher mind doesn't identify with ideas. Why would you? It's an experiment you're doing and it's a mental model. And if someone can come over and say, you're wrong, you'd say, where, show me, show me. And if they point out something that is wrong, you say, oh, thanks. Oh, good. I just got a little smarter, right? You're not going to identify with the thing. I'll go, yeah, kick it. See if you can break it. If you can break it, it's not that good, right? So there's both of these in our heads. And there's this tug of war between them. And sometimes, you know, if you're telling me about something with AI, I'm probably going to think with my higher mind because I'm not identified with it. But if you go and you criticize the ideas in this book, or you criticize my religious beliefs, or you criticize, I might have a harder time because the primitive mind says, no, no, no, those are our special ideas. And so, yeah. So that's one way to use this ladder is like, it's a spectrum. You know, at the top, the higher mind is doing all the thinking. And then as you go down, it becomes more of a tug of war. And at the bottom, the primitive mind is in total control. And this is distinct as you show from the spectrum of ideas. So this is how you think versus what you think. And those are distinct. Those are different dimensions. We need a vertical axis. We have all these horizontal axes, left, right, center, or, you know, this opinion all the way to this opinion. But it's like, what's much more important than where you stand is how you got there, right? And how you think. So this helps, if I can say this person's kind of on the left or on the right, but they're up high, I think, I think, in other words, I think they got there using evidence and reason, and they were willing to change their mind. Now that means a lot to me, what they have to say. If I think they're just a tribal person, and I can predict all their beliefs from hearing one, because it's so obvious what political beliefs that person's views are irrelevant to me, because they're not real. They didn't come from information. They came from a tribe's kind of, you know, sacred 10 commandments. I really like the comic you have in here with the boxer. This is the best boxer in the world. Wow, cool. Who has he beaten? No one. He's never fought anyone. Then how do you know he's the best boxer in the world? I can just tell. I mean, this connects with me. And I think with a lot of people, just because in martial arts, this is especially kind of true. There's this whole legend about different martial artists that kind of construct action figures, like, you know, thinking that Steven Seagal is the best fighter in the world, or Chuck Norris. But Chuck Norris is actually backed up. He's done really well in competition, but still, the ultimate test for particular martial arts is what we now know as mixed martial arts, UFC, and so on. And that's the actual scientific testing ground. It's a meritocracy.

Yeah, exactly. I mean, there's within certain rules, and you can criticize those rules like this doesn't actually represent the broader combat that you would think of when you're thinking about martial arts. But reality is you're actually testing things. And that's when you realize that Aikido and some of these kind of woo woo martial arts in their certain implementations don't work in the way you think they would in the context of fighting. I think this is one of the places where everyone can agree, which is why it's a really nice comic. Because then you start to talk about, map this onto ideas that people take personally, it starts becoming a lot more difficult to basically highlight that we're thinking with not with our higher mind, but with our primitive mind. Yeah, I mean, if I'm thinking with my higher mind, and now here, you can use different things for an idea as a metaphor. So here, the metaphor is a boxer for one of your conclusions, one of your beliefs. And if all I care about is truth, in other words, that means all I care about is having a good boxer. I would say, go, yeah, try, see if this person's good. In other words, I would get into arguments, which is throwing my boxer out there to fight against other ones. And if I think my argument is good, by the way, I love boxing. If I think my guy is amazing, Mike Tyson, I'm thinking, oh yeah, bring it on. Who wants to come see? I bet no one can beat my boxer. I love a good debate, right? In that case. Now, what would you think about my boxer? If not only was I telling you he was great, but he's never boxed anyone. But then you said, okay, well, your idea came over to try to punch him. And I screamed and I said, what are you doing? That's violence. And you're an awful person. And I don't want to be friends with you anymore because you would think this boxer obviously sucks. Or at least I think it sucks deep down because why would I be so anti? Anyone? No boxing allowed. So I think if you're in, so I call this a ladder, right? If you're in low rung land, whether it's a culture or whatever, a debate, an argument when someone says, no, that's totally wrong, what you're saying about that. And here's why. You're actually being totally biased. It sounds like a fight. People are going to say, oh, wow, we got in like a fight. It was really awkward. Like, are we still friends with that person? Because that's not a culture of boxing. It's a culture where you don't touch each other's ideas. That's insensitive versus in a high rung culture. It's sport. I mean, like everyone in your podcast, whether you're agreeing or disagreeing, the tone is the same. It's not like, oh, this got awkward. It's like, the tone is identical because you're just playing intellectually either way, because it's a good high rung space. At his best. At his best. But people do take stuff personally. And then that's actually one of the skills of conversation, just as a fan of podcasts, is when you sense that people take a thing personally, you have to like, there's sort of methodologies and little paths you can take to like calm things down, like go around. Don't take it as a violation of like that. You're trying to suss out which of their ideas are sacred to them and which ones are, bring it on. And sometimes it's actually, I mean, that's the skill of it, I suppose, that sometimes it's the certain wardings in the way you challenge those ideas are important. You can challenge them indirectly and then together, walk together in that way. Because what I've learned is people are used to their ideas being attacked in a certain way, in a certain tribal way. And if you just avoid those, like for example, if you have political discussions and just never mention left to right or Republican and Democrat, none of that, just talk about different ideas and avoid certain kind of triggering words, you can actually talk about ideas versus falling into this path that's well established through battles that people have previously fought. When you say triggering,

I mean, who's getting triggered? The primitive mind. So what you're trying to do, what you're saying in this language is, how do you have conversations with other people's higher minds, almost like whispering, without waking up the primitive mind? Is there sleeping, right? And as soon as you say something, the left primitive mind gets up and says, what? What are you saying about the left? And now, now that everything goes off the rails. What do you make of conspiracy theories under this framework of the latter? So here's the thing about conspiracy theories is that once in a while they're true, right? Because sometimes there's an actual conspiracy. Actually, humans are pretty good at real conspiracies, secret things. And then, you know, I just watched the made off doc, great new Netflix doc, by the way. And so the question is, how do you create a system that is good at you put the conspiracy theory in? And it either goes, eh, or it says, it's interesting, let's keep exploring it. Like, how do you put, how do you do something that it can, how do you assess? And so again, I think the high rung culture is really good at it because a real conspiracy, you're, what's going to happen is you put it, it's like a little machine you put in the middle of the table and everyone starts firing darts at it or bow and arrow or whatever and everyone starts kicking it and trying to, and almost all conspiracy theories, they quickly crumble, right? Because they actually, you know, you know, Trump's election one is, you know, I actually dug in and I looked at like every claim that he or his team made and I was like, all of these, none of these hold up to scrutiny, none of them. I was open minded, but none of them did. So that was one that as soon as it's open to scrutiny, it crumbles. The only way that conspiracy can stick around in a, in a community is if it is a culture where that's being treated as a sacred idea that no one should kick or throw a dart at because if you throw a dart, it's going to break. So it's being, it's, and so the, what you want is a, is a culture where no idea is sacred. Anything can get thrown at. And so I think that then what you'll find is that 94 out of 100 conspiracy theories come in and they fall down. The other, maybe four of the others come in and there's something there, but it's not as extreme as people say. And then maybe one is a huge deal and it's actually a real conspiracy. Well, isn't there a lot of gray area and there's a lot of mystery? Isn't that where the conspiracy theories seep in? So it's great to hear that you've really looked into the, the Trump election fraud claims, but aren't they resting on a lot of kind of gray area, like fog basically saying that there is dark forces in the shadows that are actually controlling everything. I mean, the same thing with maybe you can, there's like safer conspiracy theories, more less controversial ones. Like, have we landed on the moon, right? Did the United States ever land on the moon? There's, you know, you can, like the reason those conspiracy theories work is you could construct, there's incentives and motivation for faking the moon landing. There's a lot of, there's a, there's very little data supporting the moon landing. Like that's very public and kind of looks fake space. And that would be a big story if it turned out to be fake. That's the, that's, that would be the argument against it. Like, are people really as a collective going to hold on to a story that big? Yeah. So that, but, but there's a lot, that the reason they work is there's mystery. Yeah. So there's a great documentary called behind the curve about flat earthers. And one of the things that you learn about flat earthers is they believe all the conspiracies, not just the flat earth. They're, they're convinced the moon landing is fake. They're convinced 9-11 was an American con job. They're convinced, you know, that name a conspiracy and they believe it. And so it's so interesting is that I think of it as a, as a skepticism spectrum. Yeah. So on one side,

you, it's like a filter in your head, a filter in your, in the beliefs section of your brain. On one end of the spectrum, you are gullible, perfectly gullible. You believe anything someone says, right? On the other side, you're paranoid. You think everyone's lying to you, right? Everything's, everything is false. Nothing that anyone says is true, right? So obviously, those aren't good places to be. Now the healthy place, I think that the, so, so, so I think the healthy place is to be somewhere in the middle. And, but also you can learn to trust certain sources and then, you know, you don't have to do as much, apply as much skepticism to them. And so here's what, like, when you start having a bias, just say you have a political bias, when your side says something, you, you will find yourself moving towards the gullible side of the spectrum. You read an article written that supports your views. You move to the gullible side of the spectrum and you just believe it and you don't have any, where's that skepticism that you normally have, right? And then you move, and then you soon, soon as it's the other person talking, the other team talking, you move to the skeptical, the closer to that, to the, you know, in denial, paranoid side. Now, flat earthers are the extreme. They are either at 10 or 1. So it's like, it's so interesting because they're the people who are saying, ah, no, I won't believe you. I'm not gullible. No, everyone else is gullible about the moon landing. I won't. And then yet, when there's this evidence like, oh, because you can't see Seattle, you can't see the buildings over that horizon, and you should, which isn't true, you should be, if it were, if the earth were round, you wouldn't be able to see them. Therefore, it's, so suddenly they become the most gullible person to hear any theory about the earth flat. They believe it. It goes right into their beliefs. So they're actually jumping back and forth between refuses to believe anything and believe anything. And so they're the extreme example. But I think when it comes to conspiracy theories, the people that get themselves into trouble are the ones who they become really gullible when they hear a conspiracy theory that kind of fits with their worldview. And they likewise, when there's something that's kind of obviously true and it's not a big lie, they will actually, they'll think it is, they just tighten up their kind of skepticism filter. And so, yeah. So I think the healthy place is to be is where you are not, because you also don't want to be the person who says every conspiracy, you hear the word conspiracy theory, and it sounds like a synonym for like quack job crazy theory, right? So, yeah. So I think, yeah, I think it's to be somewhere in the middle of that spectrum and to learn to fine tune it, which is a tricky place to operate. Because you kind of have to every time you hear a new conspiracy theory, you should approach it with an open mind. And, you know, and also if you don't have enough time to investigate, which most people don't kind of still have a humility not to make a conclusive statement that that's nonsense. There's a lot of social pressure, actually, yeah, to immediately laugh off any conspiracy theory, if it's done by the bad guys, right? You will quickly get mocked and laughed at and not taken seriously. If you give any credence, you know, back to the lab leak was that it was a good one where it's like turned out that that was at least very credible, if not true. And that was a perfect example of one where when it first came out, and not only so, so, so Brett Weinstein talked about it. And then I, in a totally different conversation said something complimentary about him on a totally different subject. And people were saying, Tim, you might have gone a little off the deep end, you're like quoting someone who is like a lab leak person. So I was getting my reputation dinged for complimenting on a different topic, someone whose reputation was totally sullied, because they

have, you know, they questioned an orthodoxy. Right. So you see, so what does that make me want to do? Distance myself from Brett Weinstein, that's the least they see incentive that's and what does that make other people want to do? Don't become the next Brett Weinstein. Don't say it out loud because you don't want to become someone that no one wants to compliment anymore.

Right. You can see the social pressure. And that's, and of course, when there is a conspiracy, that social pressure is its best friend. Because then they see the people from outside are seeing that social pressure enact like Tim Urban becoming more and more and more extreme to the other side. And so they're going to take the more and more and more extreme. I mean, this, what do you see that the pandemic did? Like COVID did to our civilization in that regard, in the forces? Why was it so divisive? Do you understand that?

Yeah. So COVID, you know, I thought might be, you know, we always know the ultimate example of the topic that will unite us all is the alien attack. Although honestly, I don't even have that much faith then I think there'd be like some people are super like, you know, pro-alien and some people aren't the alien. But anyway.

I was actually trying to interrupt because I was talking to a few astronomers and they're the first folks that maybe kind of said in that if we discover life on Mars, for example, that there's going to be potentially a division over that too, where half the people will not believe that's real.

So, well, because we live in a current society where the political divide has subsumed everything. And that's not always like that. It goes into stages like that. We're in a really bad one where it's actually in the book, I call it like a vortex, like almost like a whirlpool that pulls everything into it. It pulls and so normally you'd say, okay, you know, immigration naturally going to be contentious. That's always political, right? But like COVID seemed like, oh, that's one of those that will unite us all. Let's fight this not human virus thing.

Like obvious is no one's sensitive. No one's like getting hurt when we insult the virus. Like let's all be, we have this threat, this common threat that's a threat to everyone of every nationality in every country, every ethnicity and what it didn't do that at all.

The whirlpool was too powerful. So it pulled COVID in and suddenly masks. If you're on the left, you like them. If you're on the right, you hate them. And suddenly lockdowns. If you're on the left, you like them. And on the right, you hate them. And vaccines, this is people forget this when Trump first started talking about the vaccine, Biden, Harris, Cuomo, they're all saying, I'm not taking that vaccine, not from this CDC. Because it was too rushed or something like that. But because I'm not trusting anything that Trump says. Trump wants me to take it. I'm not taking it. I'm not taking it from this CDC. So this was, if Trump, this Trump was almost out of office, but at the time, if Trump had been, it would have been, I'm pretty sure it would have stayed. Right likes vaccines. The left doesn't like vaccines. Instead, the president switched.

And all those people are suddenly saying, they were actually specifically saying that if you, you know, that like, if you're saying the CDC is not trustworthy, that's misinformation, which is exactly what they were saying about the other CDC. And they were saying it because they genuinely didn't trust Trump, which is fair. But now when other people don't trust the Biden CDC, suddenly it's this kind of misinformation that needs to be censored.

So it was a sad moment because it was a couple of months at the very, even a week or so. I mean,

a month or so at the very beginning when it felt like a lot of our other squabbles were kind of like, oh, I feel like they're kind of irrelevant right now. And then very quickly, the whirlpool sucked it in. And in a way where I think it damaged the reputation of these, a lot of the trust in a lot of these institutions for a long run. But there's also an individual psychological impact. It's like a vicious negative feedback cycle where they were deeply affected on an emotional level and people just were not their best selves. That's definitely true. Yeah. I mean, talk about the primitive mind. I mean, one thing that we've been dealing with for our whole human history is pathogens. And it's emotional, right? It brings out, there's really interesting studies where they study the phenomenon of disgust, which is one of these like, smiling is universal. You don't have to ever translate a smile, right? Throwing your hands up when your sports team wins is universal because it's part of our coding. And so is disgust to kind of make this like, you know, face where you wrinkle up your nose and you kind of put out your tongue and maybe even gag. That's to expel, expel whatever it's because it's the reaction when something is potentially a pathogen that might harm us, right? Feces, vomit, whatever. But they did this interesting study where people who in two groups, the control group, you know, was shown images of, and I might be getting two studies mixed up, but they were showing images of like car crashes and like disturbing, but not disgusting. And the other one was showing like, you know, like, you know, rotting things and just just things that were disgusting. And then they were asked about immigration. These were Canadians. And the group that was had the disgust feeling going pulsing through their body was way more likely to prefer like immigrants from white countries. And the group that was had shown car accidents, they were, they still prefer the groups from white countries, but much less so. And so what does that mean? It's because the disgust impulse makes us scared of, you know, sexual practices that are foreign of ethnicities that are not look, they don't look like us of, of, it's still xenophobia. So it's, it's ugly. It's really ugly stuff. This is of course also how, you know, the Nazi propaganda with cockroaches and, or it was Rwandan was cockroaches, you know, the Nazis was rats. And, you know, it's, it's specifically, it's a dehumanizing emotion. So anyway, we were, we were, we were talking about COVID, but I think it does, it taps deep into like the human psyche. And it's, I don't think it brings out our, I think, like you said, I think it brings out an ugly side in us. You describe an idea lab as being opposite of echo chambers. So we know what echo chambers are. And you said, like, just basically no good term for the opposite of an echo chamber. So what's an idea lab? Yeah, well, first of all, both of these, we think of an echo chamber as like a group maybe or even a place, but it's, it's a culture. It's an intellectual culture. Sure. And this goes along with the high rung, so high rung and low rung thinking is individual. That's what I was talking about what's going on in your head, but this is very connected to the social scene around us. And so groups will do high rung and low rung thinking together. Basically, it's, so an echo chamber to me is a collaborative low rung thinking. It is, it's a culture where the cool, it's based around a sacred set of ideas. And it's the coolest thing you can do in an echo chamber culture is talk about how great the sacred ideas are and how bad and evil and stupid and wrong the people are who have the other views. And this, and, and, and it's, it's quite boring, you know, it's quite boring, because you know, it's very hard to learn and changing your mind is not cool in an echo chamber

culture. It makes you seem wishy-washy. It makes you seem like, you know, like you're waffling and you're flip-flopping or whatever. Showing conviction about the sacred ideas in echo chamber culture is awesome. If you're just like, you know, obviously this is what it is, it makes you seem smart while being, you know, humble makes you seem dumb. So now flip all of those things on their heads and you have an, you have the opposite, which is idea lab culture, which is collaborative high rung thinking. It's collaborative truth finding, but it's also just, it's just a totally different vibe. It's, it's a place where arguing is a fun thing. It's not, no one's getting offended. And, and criticizing like the thing everyone believes is actually, it makes you seem like interesting. Like, oh, really? Like, why, why do you think we're all wrong? And expressing too much conviction makes people lose trust in you. It doesn't make you seem smart. It makes you seem stupid if you don't really know what you're talking about, but you're acting like you do. I really like this diagram of where on the x-axis agreement, the y-axis is decency. That's in an idea lab. In an echo chamber, there's only one axis. It's asshole to non-asshole. Right. This is a really important thing to understand about the difference between, you call it decency here, about asshole-ishness and disagreement. So my college friends, we love to argue, right? And, and no one thought anyone was an asshole for, it was just for sport. Sometimes we'd realize we're not even disagreeing on something and that would be disappointing and be like, oh, I think we agree. And it was kind of like sad. It was like, oh, well, there goes the fun. And one of the members of this group has this, she brought her new boyfriend to one of our like hangouts. And there was like a heated, heated debate, you know, just, just, just one of our typical things. And afterwards, you know, the next day he said, like, is everything okay? And she was like, what do you mean? And he said, like, after, you know, the fight, and she was like, what fight? And he was like, you know, the fight last night. And she was like, and she had to, and then she was like, you mean like the arguing? And she, and he was like, yeah. And she, and so that's someone who is not used to idea lab culture coming into it. And seeing it is like, that was like, this is like, are they still friends? Right. And idea lab is nice for the people in them, because you're individuals thrive. You don't want to just conform. That doesn't, it makes you seem boring in an idea. But you want to be yourself, you want to challenge things, you want to have a unique brain. So that's great. And, and, and you also have people criticizing your ideas, which makes you smarter. It doesn't always feel good, but you, you become more correct and smarter. And echo chamber is the opposite where it's not good for the people in it. It doesn't, you're learning skills, atrophy. And, and I think it's boring, but the thing is they also have emergent properties. So the emergent property of an idea lab is like super intelligence, just you and me alone, just the two of us, if we're working together on something, but we're being really grown up about it. We're, we're disagreeing. We're not, you know, no one's set sensitive about anything. We're going to each find flaws in the other one's arguments that you wouldn't have found on your own. And we're going to have epiphany, double the epiphanies, right? So it's almost like the two of us together is like as smart as 1.5 is like 50% smarter than either of us alone. Right. So you have this 1.5 intelligent kind of joint being that we've made now, bringing a third person and fourth person in, right? You see, it starts to scale up. This is why science institutions can discover the relativity and quantum mechanics and these things that no individual human, you know, was going to come up with without a ton of collaboration because it's

this giant idea lab. So it has an emergent property of super intelligence and echo chamber is the opposite where it has the emergent property of stupidity. I mean, has the emergent property of a bunch of people all, you know, you know, paying field, you know, fealty to this set of sacred ideas. And so you lose this magical thing about language and humans, which is collaborative intelligence, you lose it, it disappears. But there is that axis of decency, which is really interesting because you kind of painted this picture of you and your friends arguing really harshly. But underlying that is a basic camaraderie, respect. There's, there's all kinds of mechanisms we humans have constructed to communicate, like mutual respect, or maybe communicate the year here for the idea lab version of this. Totally. You don't take it, you don't get personal, right? You're not getting personal. You're not, you're not taking things personally. People are respected in an idea lab and ideas are disrespected. And there's a way, ways to signal that. So like for, with friends, you've already done the signaling, you've already established a relationship. The interesting thing is online. I think you have to do some of that work. To me, sort of steelmaning the other side or no, having empathy and hearing out, being able to basically repeat the argument the other person is making before you and show them like respect to that argument. I could see how you could think that before you make a counter argument. There's just a bunch of ways to communicate that you're here not to do kind of, what is it, low rung, you know, shit talking, mockery, derision, but are actually here ultimately to discover the truth in the space of ideas and the tension of those ideas. And I think it's, I think that's a skill that we're all learning as a civilization of how to do that kind of communication effectively. Because I think disagreement, as I'm learning on the internet, it's actually a really tricky skill, like high effort, high decency disagreement. Like I listened to, there's a really good debate podcast, Intelligent Squared. And like they, they can go pretty hard in the paint. It's a classic idea lab. Exactly. But like, how do we map that to the social media? When people like, we'll say, we'll say, well, like Lex or anybody, you're not, you hate disagreement, you want a sense of disagreement. No, I love Intelligent Squared type of disagreement. That's fun. You want to reduce asshole. And for me, personally, I don't want to reduce asshole. You know, I kind of like assholery. It's like fun in many ways. But the problem is when the asshole shows up to the party, they make it less fun for the, for the party that's there for the idea lab. And the other people, especially the quiet voices at the back of the room, they leave. And so all you're left is, was, was with assholes. Well, that Twitter, political Twitter to me is one of those parties. It's a big party where a few assholes have really sent a lot of the quiet thinkers away. Yeah. And, and so, so if you think about this graph again, what, what Twitter, what some place like Twitter, a great way to get followers is to be an asshole with a certain, you know, pumping a certain ideology, you'll get a huge amount of followers. And for those followers, and the followers you're going to get the people who would like, you know, the people who like you are probably going to be people who are really thinking with their primitive mind because they're seeing your, your being, your being an asshole, but because you agree with them, they love you. And they think they don't see any problem with how you're being. Yeah, they don't see the asshole. This is a fascinating thing. Because look, look at the thing on the right, agreement and decency are the same.

So if you're in that mindset, the bigger the asshole, the better. If you're agreeing with me, you're my man. I love what you're saying. Yes, show them. Right. And the algorithm helps those people does, those people do great on the algorithm. There's a fascinating dynamic that happens. Because I have, I've currently hired somebody that looks at my social media and they block people because they ask those who will roll in, they're not actually there to have an interesting disagreement, which I love. They're there to do kind of mockery. And then when they get blocked, they then celebrate that to their echo chamber, like, look at this, I got them or whatever they or they'll say some annoying thing, like, Oh, so it's, so he talks about, he likes, you know, if I've done this, they'll say, Oh, he says he likes idea labs, but he actually wants to create an echo chamber. But I'm like, Nope, you're an asshole. I'm not, I just look at the other 50 people on this thread that disagreed with me respectfully. They're not blocked. Yep. Exactly. You know, and so they see it as some kind of hypocrisy, because again, they only see the thing on the right. And they're not understanding that there's two axes or I see it as two axes. And so you seem petty in that moment, but it's like, no, no, no, this is very specific what I'm doing. You're actually killing the conversation. I generally, I give all those folks a pass and just send them love telepathically. But yes, like, it's getting rid of assholes in the conversation is the way you allow for the disagreement. You do a lot of like, when I think when like, primitive mindedness comes at you, at least on Twitter, I don't know what you're feeling internally in that moment, but you do a lot of like, I'm going to meet that with my higher mind. And you come out and you'll be like, you'll be like, thanks for all the criticism. I love you. And that's that that that that's actually a wet amazing response, because it just it what it does is it that it unriles up that person's primitive mind and actually wakes up their higher mind who says, Oh, okay, you know, this guy's not so bad. And suddenly like, civility comes back. So it's a very powerful, hopefully long term. But the thing is, they do seem to drive away high quality disagreement. Because like, because it takes so much effort to disagree in a high quality way. I've noticed this on my blog, like my one of the things I pride myself on is like, my comment section is awesome. Like, there's, there's, there's every, everyone's being respectful. No one's afraid to disagree with me and tell them and say, say, you know, tear my post apart, but in a totally respectful way where the underlying thing is like, I'm here because I like this guy in his writing. And people disagree with each other and they get in these long interest and it's interesting. And I read it and I'm learning. And then I, you know, I have a couple posts, especially the ones I've written about politics. It's not like it seems like any other comment section, people are being nasty to me, they're being nasty to each other. And then I looked down one of them and I realized like, almost all of this is the work of like three people. That's who you need to block those people need to be blocked. You're not being thin-skinned. You're not being petty doing it. You're actually protecting an idea lab because what would really aggressive people like that do is they'll turn it into their own echo chamber because now everyone is scared to kind of disagree with them. It's unpleasant. And so people who will chime in or the people who agree with them and suddenly like they've taken over the space. And I kind of believe that those people on a different day could actually do high effort disagreement. It's just that they're in a certain kind of mood. And a lot of us, just like you said, with the primitive mind could get into that mood. And it's, I believe it's

actually the job of the technology, the platform to incentivize those folks to be like, are you sure this is the best you can do? Like if you really want to talk shit about this idea, like do better. Like, yeah. And then we need to create incentives where you get likes for high effort disagreement. Because currently you get likes for like something that's slightly funny and is a little bit like mockery. Like, yeah, basically signals to some kind of echo chamber that this person is a horrible person is a hypocrite is evil, whatever, that feels like it's solvable with technology. Because I think in our private lives, none of us want that.

I wonder if it's making me think that I want to like, because a much easier way for me to do it just for my, my world would be to say something like, you know, here's this axis, this high, this is, this is part of what I, part of what I like about the latter is it's a language that we can use. It's like, specifically what we're talking about is high wrong disagreement, good, low wrong disagreement, bad, right? And so it gives us like a language for that. And so what I would say is I would, you know, my, you know, I would have my, you know, readers, you know, understand this axis. And then I would specifically say something like, please do the, do the, do it, but why a favor and upvote regardless of what they're saying horizontally, right?

Regardless of what their actual view is, upvote high rungness, they can be tearing me apart, they can be saying great, they can be praising me, whatever, upvote high rungness and downvote low rungness. And if enough people are doing that, suddenly there's all this incentive to try to say, no, I need to calm my emotion down here and not be yet personal because I'm going to get voted into oblivion by these people.

I think a lot of people would be very good at that. They, they, and they not are only, would they be good at that? They would want that, that task of saying, I know I completely disagree with this person, but this was a high effort, uh, high rung disagreement.

It gets everyone thinking about that other axis too. You're not just looking at, where do you stand horizontally? You're saying, well, how did you get there? And how are you, you know, are you treating ideas like machines or are you treating them like little, you know, babies? And then there should be some kind of labeling on personal attacks versus idea disagreement. Sometimes people like throwing both a little bit. Right. That's like, all right. No, like there should be a disincentive at personal attacks versus idea attacks.

Well, you can also, one metric is a respectful disagreement. If I see, just say someone else's Twitter and I see, you know, you put out a thought and I see someone say, you know, someone say, um, you know, I don't see it that way. Here's, here's where I think you went wrong and they're just explaining. I'm thinking that if Lex reads that, he's going to be interested.

He's going to, he's going to want to post more stuff, right? Because he's going to like that. If I see someone being like, um, wow, this really shows the kind of person that you become or shows something. I'm thinking that person is making Lex want to be on Twitter less. It's making him, it's, and so what's that doing? What that person's actually doing is they're putting, is they're actually, they're chilling discussion because they're making it unpleasant to, they're making it scary to say what you think. And the first person isn't at all. The first person is making you want to say more stuff. So, and those are both disagree. Those are people who are both disagree with you. Exactly. Exactly. I want to, great disagreement with friends in meat space is like you're, they disagree with you. They could be even yelling at you.

Honestly, they could even have some shit talk where it's like personal attacks. It still feels

good. Because you know them well and you know that that shit talk, because like, yeah, friends shit talk all the time, playing a, playing a sport or a game. And again, it's, it's because they know each other well enough to know that this is fun. We're having fun. And obviously I love you. Like, you know, and, and that's, that's important online. It's a lot harder. Yeah. That, that obviously I love you that underlies a lot of human interaction. Right. Seems to be easily lost online. I've seen some people on Twitter and elsewhere just behave they're worst. Yeah. And it's like, I know that's not who you are. Totally. Like, why are you? I actually, you know, I know this is human. I know someone personally who is one of the best people. Yeah. I'm just, I love this guy. Like one of the best, like fun, funny, and like nicest dudes. And he, if you would, if you looked at this Twitter only, you would think he's a culture warrior, an awful culture warrior and, you know, you know, biased and just stoking anger. And, and, and it comes out of a good place. And I'm not going to give any other info about, you know, specific, but like, I think you're describing a lot of people. It comes out of a good place because he really cares about what he, you know, it comes out, but it's just, I can't square the two. It's so, and that's, you have to, once you know someone like that, you can realize, okay, apply that to everyone. Cause a lot of these people are lovely people. And it just brings, even just, you know, back in the before social media, did you ever had a friend who like was just like, they had this like dickishness on text or email that they didn't have in person. And you're like, wow, like email you is like kind of a dick. And it's like, it just, certain people have a different persona behind the screen. It has for me personally, become a bit of a meme that Lex blocks with love. But there is a degree to that where this is, I don't see people on social media as representing who they really are. I really do have love for them. I really do think positive thoughts of them throughout the entirety of the experience. I see this as some weird side effect of online communication. And so it's like, to me, blocking is not some kind of a derisive act towards that individual. It's just like saying, well, a lot of times what's happened is they have slipped into a very common delusion that dehumanizes others. So that doesn't mean they're a bad person. We all can do it. But they're dehumanizing you or whoever they're they're being nasty to, because they in a way they would never do in person, because in a person they're reminded that's a person. Remember, I said the dumb part of my brain when I'm doing VR like won't step off the cliff, but the smart part of my brain knows I'm just on the rug. That dumb part of our brain is really dumb in a lot of ways. It's the part of your brain where you can set the clock five minutes fast to help you not be late. The smart part of your brain knows that you did that, but the dumb part will fall for it. That same dumb part of your brain can forget that the person behind that screen that behind that handle is a human that has feelings. And that doesn't mean they're a bad person for forgetting that because it's possible. Well, this really interesting idea and I wonder if it's true that you write is that both primitive mindedness and high-mindedness tend to be contagious. I hope you're right that it's possible to make both contagious, because our sort of popular intuition is only one of them. The primitive mindedness is contagious as exhibited by social media. To compliment you again, don't you think that your Twitter to me is like, I was just looking down and I mean, it's just high-mindedness. It's just high-mindedness down, down, down, down, down. It's gratitude. It's optimism. It's love. It's forgiveness. It's all these things that are the opposite of grievance and victimhood and resentment and

pessimism, right? And there's, I think, a reason that a lot of people follow you because it is contagious. It makes other people feel those feelings. I don't know. I've been recently, over the past few months, attacked quite a lot. It is fascinating to watch because it's over things that I think I probably have done stupid things, but I'm being attacked for things that are totally not worthy of attack. I got attacked for a book list. I saw that by the way. I thought it was great. But you can always kind of find ways to, I guess the assumption is this person surely is a fraud or some other explanation. He sure has dead bodies in the basement. He's hiding or something like this. And then I'm going to construct a narrative around that and mock and attack that. I mean, I don't know how that works, but there is, there does, and I think you write this in the book, there seems to be a gravity pulling people towards the primitive mind. But when it comes to anything political, religious, certain things are bottom heavy for our psyche. They have a magnet that pulls our psyches downwards on the ladder. And why? Why does politics pull our psyches down on the ladder? Because for the tens of thousand years that we were evolving during human history, it was life or death. Politics was life or death. And so there's actually an amazing study where it's like they challenged 20 different beliefs of a person. And different parts of the person's brain, and they had an MRI going, different parts of the person's brain lit up when non-political beliefs were challenged versus political beliefs were challenged. When political beliefs were challenged, when non-political beliefs were challenged, the rational, prefrontal cortex type areas were lit up. When the political beliefs were challenged, and then I'm getting over my head here, but it's like the parts of your brain, the default mode network, the parts of your brain associated with introspection and your own identity were lit up. And they were much more likely to change their mind on all the beliefs, the non-political beliefs. When that default mode network part of your brain lit up, you were going to, if anything, get more firm in those beliefs when you had them challenged. So politics is one of those topics that just literally lights up different part of our brain. And again, I think we come back to primitive mind, higher mind here. This is one of the things our primitive mind comes programmed to care a ton about. And so it's going to be very hard for us to stay rational and calm and looking for truth because we have all this gravity. Well, it's weird because politics, like what is politics? Like you talk about, there's a bunch of different issues and each individual issue, if we really talk about it. Tax policy, like why are we being emotional about this? I don't think we're actually that, I mean, yeah, we're emotional about something else. Yeah, I think what we're emotional about is my side, the side I've identified with, is in power and making the decisions. And your side is out of power. And if your side's in power, that's really scary for me because that goes back to the idea of who's pulling the strings in this tribe. Who's the chief? Is it your family's patriarch or is it mine? We might not have food if we don't win this kind of whatever chief election. So I think that it's not about the tax policy or anything like that. And then it gets tied to this like broader. I think a lot of our tribalism has really coalesced around this. We don't have that much religious tribalism in the U.S., right? Now they know the Protestants and the Catholics hate each other. We don't have that really, right? And honestly, you say people like to say we have racial tribalism and everything, but a white, even a kind of a racist white conservative guy, I think takes the black

conservative over the woke white person any day of the week right now. So that's the strongest source of the division. It tells me that I think politics is way stronger tribalism right now. I think that that white racist guy loves the black conservative guy compared to the white woke guy, right? So again, not that racial tribalism isn't a thing. Of course, it's always a thing, but like political tribalism is the number one right now. So race is almost a topic for the political division versus the actual element of the tribe. It's a political football. So this is a book about human civilization. This is a book about human nature, but it's also a book about politics. It is just the way you listed out in the book. It's kind of dark how we just fall into these left and right checklists. So if you're on the left, it's maintaining where we weighed universal healthcare, good mainstream media, fine guns, kill people. US as a racist country, protect immigrants, tax cuts, bad climate change, awful, raise minimum wage. And on the right is a flip of that reverse where we weighed universal healthcare, bad mainstream media, bad people, kill people, not guns, kill people. US was a racist country, protect borders, tax cuts, good climate change, overblown, don't raise minimum wage. I mean, you almost don't have to think about any of this. So when you say it's a book about politics, it's interesting because it's a book about the vertical axis. It's specifically not a book about the horizontal axis in that I'm not talking, I don't actually talk about any of these issues. I don't put out an opinion on them. Those are all horizontal, right? And rather than having another book about those issues, about right versus left, I wanted to do a book about this other axis. And so on this axis, the reason I had this checklist is that this is a low part of the low rung politics world, right? Low rung politics is a checklist. And that checklist evolves, right? Like Russia suddenly is like popular with the right as opposed to, you know, used to be in the 60s, the left was the one defending Stalin, like, so they'll switch. It doesn't even matter. The substance doesn't matter. It's that this is the approved checklist of the capital P party, and this is what everyone believes. That's a low rung thing. The high rungs, this is not what it's like. High rung politics, you tell me your one view on this, I have no idea what you think about anything else, right? And you're going to say, I don't know about a lot of stuff because inherently you're not going to have that strong an opinion because you don't have that much info. These are complex things. So there's a lot of, I don't know, and people are all over the place. You know you're talking to someone who has been subsumed with low rung politics when if they tell you their opinion on any one of these issues, you could just, you know you could just rattle off their opinion on every single other one. And if in three years it becomes fashionable to have this new view, they're going to have it. That's, you're not thinking, that's echo chamber culture. And I've been using kind of a shorthand of centrists to describe this kind of a high rung thinking, but people tend to, I mean, it seems to be difficult to be a centrist or whatever, a high rung thinker. It's like people want to label you as a person who's too cowardly to take stands, somehow, as opposed to saying, I don't know is a first statement. Well, the problem with centrist is that would mean that in each of these tax cuts bag, tax cuts good. It means that you are saying, I am in, I think we should have some tax cuts, but not that many. You might not think that. You might actually do some research and say, actually, I think tax cuts are really important. That doesn't mean, oh, I'm not a centrist anymore. I guess I'm a far, you know, no, no, no. That's why we need

the second axis. So what you're trying to be when you say centrist is high rung, which means you might be all over the place horizontally. You might agree with the far left on this thing, the far right on this thing, that you might agree with the centrists on this thing. But, but calling yourself a centrist actually like is putting yourself in a prison on the horizontal axis. And, and saying that, you know, I whatever the on the on the different topics, I'm right in between the two policy wise. That's not where you are. So yeah, that's what we're badly missing this other axis. Yeah, I mean, I still do think it's just like for me, I am a centrist when you project it down to the horizontal. But the point is you're missing so much data by not considering the vertical, because like on average, maybe it falls somewhere in the middle. But in reality, there's just a lot of nuance issue to issue that involves just thinking and uncertainty and changing in the given the context of the current geopolitics and economics and just always considering, always questioning, always evolving your views, all of that. Not just not just about like, oh, I think we should be in the center on this. But another way to be in the center is if there's some phenomenon happening, you know, there's a terrorist attack, you know, and one side wants to say this has nothing to do with Islam. And the other one, the other side wants to say this is radical Islam, right? What's in between those is saying this is complicated and nuanced, and we have to learn more and it probably has something to do with Islam and something to do with the economic circumstances and something to do with, you know, geopolitics. So in the case like that, you actually do get really unnuanced when you go to the extremes and all of that nuance, which is where all the truth usually is, is going to be in the middle. So yeah, but there's a truth to the fact that if you take that nuance on those issues, like one Ukraine COVID, you're going to be attacked

by both sides. Yes. People who have, who are really strongly on one side or the other hate centrist people. I've gotten this myself and you know, the slur that I've had thrown at me is I'm an enlightened centrist in a very mocking way. So what are they actually saying? What does enlightened centrist mean? It means someone who is, you know, Steven Pinker or Jonathan Hyde gets accused of is, you know, that they're highfalutin, you know, intellectual world, and they don't actually have any, they don't actually take a side, they don't actually get their hands dirty, and they can be superior to both sides without actually taking a stand. Right. So I see the argument and I disagree with it because I firmly believe that the hardcore tribes, they think they're taking a stand and they're out in the streets and they're pushing for something. I think what they're doing is they're just driving the whole country downwards. And I think they're hurting all the causes they care about. And so it's not that, it's not that, you know, it's not that we need everyone to be sitting there, you know, refusing to take a side. It's that you can be far left and far right, but be upper left and upper right. If we talk about the, you use the word liberal a lot in the book to mean something that we don't in modern political discourse mean. So it's this higher philosophical view and then you use the words progressive to mean the left and conservative to mean the right. Can you describe the concept of liberal games and power games? So the power games is what I call the like, basically just the laws of nature as the, when laws of nature are the laws of the land, that's the power game. So animals, watch any David Attenborough special. And when the little lizard is running away from the, the, you know, the bigger animal or whatever. And I use an example of a bunny and a bear, I don't even know if bears eat bunnies, they probably don't, but pretend bears eat bunnies.

All right. So it's like, in the power games, the bears chasing the bunny. There's no fairness. There's no, okay, well, what's right? But, you know, what, what, what, what's legal? No, no, no, if the bear is fast enough, it can eat the bunny. If the bunny is can get away, it can say living. And so that's it. That's the only rule. Now humans have spent a lot of time in essentially that environment. So when you have a totalitarian dictatorship, it's, and so what's the rule of the power games? It's everyone can do whatever they want if they have the power to do so. It's just a game of power. So the, if the bunny gets away, the bunny actually has more power than the bear in that situation. Right. And likewise, the totalitarian dictatorship, there's no rules that dictator can do whatever they want. They can, they can, they can torture, they can, you know, flatten a rebellion with a lot of murder because they have the power to do so. What are you going to do? Right. And that's, that's kind of the state of nature. That's our natural way. You know, that would, you know, when you look at a mafia, watch a mafia movie, you know, there's, we do a lot of, we have, we have it in us. We all have, we all can snap into power games mode when it becomes all about, you know, just, just actual raw power. Now the liberal games is, is, you know, something that civilizations for thousands of years have been working on. It's not invented by America or modern times, but America's kind of was like the latest crack at it yet, which is this idea. Instead of everyone can do what they want. If they have the power to do so, it's everyone can do what they want as long as it doesn't harm anyone else. Now that's really complicated. How do you define harm? And, and the idea is that everyone has a list of rights which are protected by the government. And then they have their inalienable rights and they're, they're protected, you know, those are protected again by, you know, from, from an invasion by other people. And so you have this kind of fragile balance. And so the idea with the liberal games is you, that there are laws, but it's not totalitarian. They will build very clear, strict laws kind of around the edges of what you can and can't do. And then everything else, freedom. So unlike a totalitarian dictatorship, actually it's, it's very loose. You can, there's a lot of things can happen and it's kind of up to the people, but there are still laws that protect the very basic inalienable rights and stuff like that. So it's this much looser thing. Now the, the vulnerability there is that it, so, so, so the, the benefits of it are obvious, right? Freedom is great. It seems like it's the most fair. They, you know, that, that equality of opportunity seemed like the most fair thing and, and, you know, equality before the law, you know, due process and all of this stuff. So it seems fair to the founders of the US and other Enlightenment thinkers. And it also is a great way to manifest productivity, right? You know, you have, you have Adam Smith saying it's not from the benevolence of the butcher or the baker that we get our dinner, but from their own, from their own self-interest. So you have, you can harness kind of selfishness for, for progress. But it has a vulnerability, which is that because the laws, it's like the totalitarian laws, they don't have an excessive laws for no reason. They want to control everything. And the US, you know, in the US, we say we're, they're not going to do that. And so the, the second, it's almost two puzzle pieces. You have the laws and then you've got a liberal culture. Liberal laws have to be married to liberal culture, kind of a defense of liberal spirit in order to truly have the liberal games going on. And so that's vulnerable because free speech, you can have the first amendment, that's the, the laws part. But if, if you're in a culture where anyone who, you know, speaks out against orthodoxy is going

to be shunned from the community, well, you're lacking the second piece of the puzzle there. You're lacking liberal culture. And so therefore you, you might as well be in a, you might as well not even have the first amendment. And there's a lot of examples like that where the culture has to do its part for the true liberal games to be enjoyed. So it's just much more complicated, much more nuanced than the power games. It's kind of, it's kind of a set of basic laws that then are coupled with a basic spirit to create this very awesome human environment that's also very vulnerable. So what do you mean that the culture has to play along? So for something like a freedom of speech to work, there has to be a basic decency that if all people are perfectly good, then perfect freedom without any restrictions is great. It's where the human nature starts getting a little iffy. We start being cruel to each other. We start being greedy and desiring of harm and also the narcissist and sociopath and psychopath and society, all of that. That's when you start to have to inject some limitations on that freedom. Yeah. I mean, if, if, so that what the , what the government basically says is we're going to let everyone be mostly free, but no one, no one is going to be free to physically harm other people or to steal their property, right? And so we're, we're also, we're all agreeing to sacrifice that, you know, that that 20% of our freedom and then in return, all of us in theory can be 80% free. And that's kind of the, the bargain. But now that's a lot of freedom to leave people with. And a lot of people choose, it's like, you're so free in the U.S., you're actually free to be unfree if you choose. That's kind of what an echo chamber is to me. It's, you know, you can, you can choose to kind of be friends with people who essentially make it, make it so uncomfortable to speak your mind that it's no actual effective difference for you than if you lived in a country, if, if you can't, you know, criticize Christianity in a certain community, that you have a First Amendment, so you're not going to get arrested by the government for criticizing Christianity. But if you, but if, but if you have this, if the social penalties are so extreme that it's just never worth it, you might as well be in a country that it, in prisons, people for criticizing Christianity. And so that's the same thing goes for, for wokeness, right? This is what people get, you know, you know, cancel culture and stuff. So when the reason these things are bad is because they're actually, they're depriving Americans of the beauty of the freedom of the liberal games by, you know, imposing a social culture that is very power games-esque. It's basically a power games culture comes in and you might as well be in the power games now. And so liberal, if you live in a liberal democracy, it's, it's, you, there will be, always be challenges to a liberal culture. Lowercase L, liberal, there'll always be challenges to a liberal culture from people who are much more interested in playing the power games. And, and, and, and there has to be kind of an immune system that stands up to that culture and says, that's not how we do things here in America, actually, we don't excommunicate people for not having the right religious beliefs or not rent, you know, we don't disinvite a speaker from campus for having the wrong political beliefs. And if it doesn't stand up for itself, it's, it's, it's like the immune system of the country failing and power games rushes in. So before chapter four in your book, and the chapters that will surely result in you being burned at the stake, you write, quote, we'll start our pitchfork tour in this chapter by taking a brief trip

through the history of the Republican Party. Then in the following chapters, we'll take a Tim's career tanking deep dive into America's social justice movement as you started to talk about. Okay, so let's go. What's the history of the Republican Party?

I'm looking at this through my vertical ladder and what is this, this familiar story of the Republicans from the sixties to today, what does it look like through the vertical lens? Right? Does it look different? And, and, and is there, is there an interesting story here that's been kind of hidden because we're always looking at the horizontal. Now the horizontal story, you'll hear people talk about it and it's, they'll say something like the Republicans have moved farther and farther to the right. And, and to me, that, that's not really true. Like, it was Trump more right wing than Reagan. I don't think so. I think he's left.

Actual policy. Yeah. Yeah. So it's, so we're using this again, it's just like you're calling yourself centrist when it's not exactly what you mean, even though it also is. Yeah.

So I, again, this, I was like, okay, look, this vertical lens helps with other things. Let's, let's apply it to the Republicans. And here, here's what I saw is I looked at the sixties and I saw an interesting story, which I don't think that, you know, not everyone's familiar with like what happened in the early sixties, but in 1960, the Republican party was very, it was a plurality. You had progressives like genuine, you know, Rockefeller, you know, pretty progressive people all the way to, you know, then you had the, you know, moderates like Eisenhower and Dewey. And then you go all the way to the, you know, farther right, you had goldwater and, you know, what you might call, I call them the fundamentalists. And so it's this interesting plurality, right? Something we don't have today.

And what happened was the goldwater contingent, which was the underdog, they were small, right? The Eisenhower was the president, had just been the president and was, it seemed like the moderates

were, you know, that was the, that's the, he said, you have to be close to the center of the chess board. That's where, that's, that's how you maintain power. These people were very far from the center of the chess board, but they ended up basically have like a hostile takeover. They conquered their own party and they did it by breaking all of the kind of unwritten rules and norms. So they did things like they first started with like the college Republicans, which was like this feeder group that turned in, you know, a lot of the politicians started there. And they, they, they went to the election and they wouldn't let the, the current president, the incumbent, speak. And they were throwing chairs and they were fistfights. And eventually people gave up and they just sat there and they sat in the chair talking for, you know, that they're got their candidate until everyone eventually left and then they declared victory. So basically they, they, they, they came in, there was a, there was a certain set of rules agreed upon rules and they came in playing the power games saying, well, actually, if we do this, you won't have the power, you know, we have the power to take it if we just break all the rules. Right. And so they did and they won. And that became a hugely influential thing, which then they, then they conquered California through again, these, these people were taken aback. These, you know, these, these, these proper Republican candidates were appalled by the kind of like, you know, the insults that were being hurled at them and the intimidation and the bullying. And eventually they ended up in the national convention, which was called like the right wing Woodstock. It was like, you know, the Republican national convention in 64 was just,

they, again, there was jeering and they wouldn't let the moderates or the progressives even speak. And there was racism, you know, you know, Jackie Robinson was there and he was a proud Republican. And he said that like, he feels like he was a Jew in Hitler's Germany with the way that blacks were being treated there. And it was nasty. And but what do they do? They had, they had fiery, you know, plurality enough to win. And they won. They ended up getting crushed in the general election and they kind of faded away. But to me, I was like, what, that was an interesting story. I see it as, I have this character in the book called the Golem, which is a big kind of a big, dumb, powerful monster. That's the, you know, the emergent property of like a political Eckhart Chamber. It's like this big giant. It's stupid, but it's powerful and scary. And to me, I was like, a Golem rose up, conquered the party for a second, knocked it on his ass, and then, and then faded away. And to me, when I looked at the Trump revolution and a lot, and not just Trump, the last 20 years, I see that same lower right, that lower right monster kind of making another charge for it, but this time succeeding and really taking over the party for a long period of time. I see the same story, which is the power games are being played in a situation when it had always been, the government relies on all these unwritten rules and norms to function. But for example, you have in 2016, Merrick Garland gets, gets nominated by Obama. And the unwritten norm says that when the president nominates a justice, then you pass them through unless there's some egregious thing. That's what has happened. But they said, actually, this is the last year of his presidency and the people should choose. I don't think we should set a new precedent where the president can't nominate people, nominate a Supreme Court justice in the last year. So they passed it through and it ends up being Gorsuch. And so they lose that seat. Now, three years later, it's Trump's last year. And it's another election year. And Ginsburg dies. And what did they say? They say, oh, let's keep our precedent. They said, no, oh, actually, we changed our mind. We're going to nominate Amy Barrett. So to me, that is classic power games, right? There's no actual rule. And what you're doing is they had the, they did technically have the power to block the nomination then. And then they technically had the power to put someone in and they, and they're pretending there's some principle to it. But they're just extra, they're going for the short term edge at the expense of what is like the workings of the system in the long run. And then one of the Democrats have to do in that situation, because both parties have been doing this is they either can lose now all the time or they start playing the power games too. And now you have a prison prisoner's dilemma where it's like, both are end up doing this thing because, and they, and everyone ends up worse off the debt ceiling, all these power plays that are being made with these, these holding the country hostage. This is power games. And to me, that's what Goldwater was doing in the sixties, but it was a healthier time in a way because there was this plurality within the parties reduced some of the national tribalism. And that there wasn't as much of an appeal to that. But today it's just like, do whatever you have to do to beat the enemies. And so I'm seeing a rise in power games and I talked about the Republicans because they did a lot of these things first. They have been a little bit more egregious, but both parties have been doing it over the last 20, 30 years. Can you place blame? Or maybe there's a different term for it at the subsystems of this. So is it the media? Is it the politicians like in the Senate in Congress? Is it Trump? So the leadership, is it, or maybe it's us, human beings, maybe social media versus mainstream media. Is there a sense of where, what is the cause of what is the symptom?

It's very complex. So as we're clients, a great book, while we're polarized, where he talks about a lot of this, and there's some of these, it's really no one's fault. First of all, it's the environment has changed in a bunch of ways you just mentioned. And what happens when you take human nature, which is a constant and you put it into an environment, behavior comes out. The environment's the independent variable. When that changes, the dependent variable, the behavior, changes with it. And so the environment has changed in a lot of ways. So one major one is it used to, for a long time actually, the first it was the Republicans and then the Democrats just had a stranglehold on Congress. It was not even competitive. The Democrats for 40 years had the majority. And so therefore, it actually is a decent environment to compromise in. Because now we can both, what you want is Congress people thinking about their home district and voting yes on a national policy because we're going to get a good deal on it back at home. That's actually healthy as opposed to voting in lockstep together because this is what the red party is doing, regardless of what's good for my home district. An example is Obamacare. There were certain Republican districts that would have actually officially been benefited by Obamacare, but every Republican voted against it. And part of the reason is because there's no longer this obvious majority. Every few years, it switches. It's a 50-50 thing. And that's partially because we've been so subsumed with this one national divide of left versus right that people are not, people are whoever, they're voting for the same party for president all the way down the ticket now. And so you have this just kind of 50-50 color war. And that's awful for compromise. So there's like 10 of these things that have redistricting, but also it is social media. It is, I call it hypercharged tribalism. In the 60s, you had kind of distributed tribalism. You had some people that are worked up about the USSR, right? They're national. That's what they care about, US versus foreign. You had some people that were saying left versus right like they had today. And then other people that were saying that they were fighting within the party. But today, you don't have that. You have ideological realignment. So you kind of got rid of a lot of the in-party fighting. And then there hasn't been that big of a foreign threat, not nothing like the USSR for a long time. So you kind of lost that. And what's left is just this left versus right thing. And so that's kind of this hypercharged whirlpool that subsumes everything. And so yeah, I mean, people point to Newt Gingrich, you know, and people like there's certain characters that enacted policies that stoked this kind of thing. But I think this is a much bigger kind of environmental shift. Well, that's going back to our questions about the role of individuals in human history. So the interesting, one of the many interesting questions here is about Trump. Is he a symptom or a cause? Because he seems to be from the public narrative, such a significant catalyst for some of the things we're seeing. This goes back to what we were talking about earlier, right? Like is it the person or is the times? I think he's a perfect example of it's a both situation. I don't think that I don't think if you plucked Trump out of this situation, I don't think it Trump was inevitable. But I think we were very vulnerable to a demagogue. And if you hadn't been, Trump would have had no chance. And so why were we vulnerable to a demagogue is because you have these, well, I mean, I think it's specifically on the right. If you actually look at the stats, it's pretty bad. Like the people who, because it's not just who voted for Trump, a lot of people just vote for the red,

right? What's interesting is who voted for Obama against Romney and then voted for Trump? Who, you know, these are not racists, right? These are not hardcore Republicans. They voted for Obama. And where did the switch come from? Places that had economic despair, where bridges were not working well. That's a signifier. We're paints chipping in the schools. These little things like this. So I think that you had this, a lot of these kind of rural towns, you have true despair. And then you also have the number one indicator of voting for Trump was distrust in media. And the media has become much less trustworthy. And so you have all these ingredients that actually make us very vulnerable to a demagogue. And a demagogue is someone who takes advantage, right? There's someone who comes in and says, I can pull all the right strings and pull and push all the right emotional buttons right now and get myself power by taking advantage of the circumstances. And that is what Trump totally did. It makes me wonder how easy it is for somebody who is a charismatic leader to capitalize on cultural resentment when there's economic hardship to channel that. So John Hite wrote a great article about like the truth. We basically, we literally like truth is in an all time low right now. Like it's the media is not penalized for lying. Yeah. Right. MSNBC Fox News, these are not penalized for being inaccurate or penalized if they stray from the orthodoxy. On social media, it's not the truest tweets that go viral. And so Trump understood that better than anyone. He took advantage of it. He was living in the current world when everyone else was stuck in the past. And he saw that and he just lied. Everything he said, the truth was not relevant at all. It's just truly, it's not relevant to him when what he's talking about. He doesn't care and he knew that neither do us a subset of the country. I was thinking about this, just reading articles by journalists, especially when you're not a famous journalist in yourself, but you're more like in your times journalists. So the big famous thing is the institution you're part of. Like you can just lie. Yeah. Because you're not going to get punished for it. You're going to be rewarded for the popularity of an article. So if you write 10 articles, there's a huge incentive to just make stuff up. You got to get clicks. To get clicks. That's the first and foremost. And like culturally, people will attack that article to say, it's not like one half the country will attack that article for saying it's dishonest, but they'll kind of forget. You will not have a reputational hit. Right. There won't be a memory like this person made up a lot of stuff in the past. No, they'll take one article at a time and they'll attach the reputation hits will be to New York Times, the institution. Yeah. And so for the individual journalists, there's a huge incentive to make stuff up. Totally. And it's scary because it's almost like you can't survive if you're just an old school honest journalist who really works hard and tries to get it right and does it with nuance. Like what you can be is you can be a big time substacker or big time podcaster. A lot of people do have a reputation for accuracy and rigor and they have huge audiences. But if you're working in a big company right now, especially, I think that many of the big media brands are very much controlled by the left, and but I will say that the ones that are controlled by the right are even more egregious. Not just in terms of accuracy, but also in terms of the New York Times for all of its criticisms, they have a handful of, here and there, they put out a pretty, you know, an article that strays from the, you know, Barry Weiss wrote there for a long time. And then you've got, they wrote an article criticizing free speech on campus stuff,

you know, recently. And they have, you know, they have a couple very, you know, left progressive friendly conservatives, but they have conservatives that are writing the op-eds. Fox News, you know, you're not seeing thoughtful, bright bar, you're not seeing thoughtful progressives writing there, right? There's some degree to which the New York Times, I think, still incentivizing the values, the vertical, the high effort. So you're allowed to have a conservative opinion if you do a really damn good job. Like if it's a very thorough, in-depth kind of. And if you kind of pander to the progressive senses in all the right ways, you know, I always joke that, you know, a Ted, they always have a couple, you know, token conservatives, but they get on stage and they're basically like, so totally, you're all, you know, where the progressives are, it's right about all of this, but maybe, maybe, you know, libertarianism isn't all about, you know, it's this. So there is an element, but you know what, it's something, it's better than being a total tribal. I think you can see the New York Times tug of war, the internal tug of war, you can see it, because then they also have these awful instances, you know, or like, you know, the firing of James Bennett, which is this whole other story, but like, they have, yeah, you can see it going both ways, but in the 60s, what did you have? You had ABC, NBC, CBS, you know, the 70s, you know, you had these three news channels and they weren't always right, and they definitely sometimes spun a narrative together, maybe, about the Vietnam or whatever, but they, if one of them was just lying, they'd be embarrassed for it, they would be penalized, they'd be dinged, and they'd be known as, this is the trash one, and that would be terrible for their ratings, because they weren't just catering to half the country, they're all catering to the whole country, so both on the axis of accuracy and on the axis of neutrality, they had to, you know, try to stay somewhere in the reasonable range, and that's just gone. One of the things I'm really curious about is, I think your book is incredible, I'm very curious to see how it's written about by the press, because I could see, click, I could myself write, with the help of Chad J. Petey, of course, clickbait articles in either direction. Yeah, it's easy to imagine. Your whole book is beautifully written for clickbait articles. If any journalist out there need help, I can help, I can write the most atrocious criticisms. Yeah, I'm ready, I'm braced.

Yeah, so speaking of which, you write about social justice. You write about two kinds of social justice, liberal social justice and SJF, social justice, fundamentalism. What are those? Yeah, so like the term wokeness is so loaded with baggage, it's kind of like mocking and derogatory, and I was trying not to do that in this book. If it's the terms loaded with baggage, you're already from the first minute you're already behind. So to me, also, when people say wokeness is bad, social justice is bad, they're throwing the baby out with the bathwater, because the proudest tradition in the US is liberal social justice. And what I mean by that, again, liberal meaning with lowercase l, it is intertwined with liberalism. So Martin Luther King classic example, his I Have a Dream speech, he says stuff like, this country has made a promise to all of its citizens and it has broken that promise to its black citizens. In other words, liberalism, the constitution, the core ideals, those are great. We're not living up to them, we're failing on some of them. So civil disobedience, the goal of it wasn't to hurt liberalism, it was to specifically break the laws that were

already violating, the laws that were a violation of liberalism to expose that this is illiberal, that the constitution should not have people of different skin color sitting in different parts of the bus. And so it was kind of a, it was really patriotic, the civil rights movement, who was saying this is a beautiful, we have a liberalism is this beautiful thing and we need to do better at it. So I call it liberal social justice. And it used the tools of liberalism to try to, to try to improve the flaws and they were going on. So free speech, you know, Mario Savio in the 60s was the, you know, he's a leftist. And what would the leftist doing in the 60s on Berkeley campus, you know, they were saying, we need more free speech. Because that's what liberal social justice was fighting for. But you can also go back to the 20s women's suffrage. I mean, so the, you know, the emancipation, the thing that America obviously has all of it's these, these are, these are all ugly things that it had to get out of, but it got out of them, you know, one by one. And it's still getting out of them. That's what's cool about America. And liberal social justice basically is the practice of saying, where are we not being perfect liberals? And now let's fix that. So that's the idea of liberalism that permeates the history in the United States, but then there's interplay. You have so many good images in this book, but one of them is highlighting the interplay of different ideas over the past, let's say a hundred years. So liberalism is on one side, there's that thread, there's Marxism on the other, and then there's postmodernism. How do those interplay together? So it's interesting because Marxism is, and all of its various, you know, descendants obviously is a lot of things that are rooted in Marxism that aren't, you know, the same thing as what Carl Marx preached. But what do they all have in common? They think liberalism is bad, right? They actually think that, that the opposite of what Martin Luther King and other people in the civil rights and other movements, they think the opposite. They think he thinks, you know, liberalism is good, we need to preserve it. They said liberalism is the problem. These other problems with racism and inequality that we're seeing, those are inevitable results of liberalism. Liberalism is a rigged game, and it's just the power games in disguise. There is no liberal games, it's just the power games in disguise, and there's the upper people that oppress the lower people, and they convince the lower people, there's all about false consciousness, they convince the lower people that everything is fair, and now the lower people vote against their own interests, and they work to preserve the system that's oppressing them. And what do we need to do? We need to actually, there's much more revolutionary, we need to overthrow liberalism, right? So people think, oh, you know, like what we call a wokeness is just, you know, a normal social justice activism, but it's like more extreme, right? It's this, no, no, it's the polar opposite, polar opposite. And so now that's the Marxist threat. Now, postmodernism is kind of, you know, this term that is super controversial, and I don't think anyone calls themselves a postmodernist or take all of this with a grain of salt in terms of the term, but what's the definition of radical? The definition of radical to me is how deep you want change to happen at. So a liberal progressive and a conservative progressive will disagree about policies. The liberal progressive wants to, you know, change a lot of policies and change, change, change, right? And the conservative is more wants to keep things the way they are. But they're both conservative when it comes to liberalism beneath it, the liberal kind of foundation of the country, they both want to, they both become conservatives about that.

The Marxist is more radical because they want to go one notch deeper and actually overthrow that foundation. Now, what's below liberalism is kind of the core tenets of modernity, this idea of reason and the notion that there is an objective truth and science as the scientific method, right? These things are actually beneath and even the Marxist. If you look at the Frankfurt School, you know, these post-Marxist thinkers and Marx himself, they were not anti-science. They believed in that bottom-bottom foundation. They were at really wanted to preserve modernity, but they wanted to get rid of liberalism on top of it. The post-modernist is even more radical because they want to actually go down to the bottom level and overthrow it. They think science itself is a tool of oppression. They think it's a tool where oppression kind of flows through, you know, they think that the white Western world has invented these concepts like, you know, they claim that there's an objective truth and that there's, you know, reason and science. And they think all of that is just one meta narrative and right, and it goes a long way to serve the interests of the powerful. So in the sense that it's almost caricatured, but that is to the core, their belief that math could be racist, for example. Oh, yeah, absolutely. Not the educational math, but literally math, the mathematics. The notion in math that there's a right answer and a wrong answer, that they believe is a meta narrative that serves white supremacy or in the post-modernist might have said it serves just the powerful or the wealthy. But what social justice fundamentalism is, is you take the Marxist thread that has been going on in lots of countries and has, and whoever the upper and lower is, that's what they all have in common, but the upper and lower, you know, and for Marx was the ruling class and the oppressed class. It was economic. And then, but you come here and the economic class doesn't, you know, it doesn't resonate as much here as it did maybe in some of those other places. But what does resonate here in the 60s and 70s is race and gender and these kind of social justice disagreements. And so what social justice fundamentalism is, is basically this tried and true framework of Marxist framework, kind of with a new skin on it, which is American social justice, and then made even more radical with the infusion of post-modernism, where, you know, not just as liberalism bad, but actually the, you know, like you said, math can be racist. So it's this kind of like philosophical Frankenstein, this like stitched together of these, and so again, it's called, you know, they wear the same uniform as the liberal social justice. They say social justice, right? You know, racial equality, but it has nothing to do with liberal social justice. It is directly opposed to liberal social justice. This is fascinating. The evolution of ideas, if we ignore the harm done by it, it's fascinating how humans get together and evolve these ideas. So as you show, Marxism is the idea that society is a zero sum. I mean, I guess zero sum is a really important thing here. Zero sum struggle between the ruling class and the working class with power being exerted through politics and economics. Then you add critical theory, Marxism 2.0 on top of that, and you add to politics and economics, you add culture and institutions. And then on top of that, for postmodernism, you add science, you have morality, basically anything else you can think of. To stitch together Frankenstein, and if you notice, which is not necessarily bad, but in this case,

I think it's actually violating the Marxist tradition by being anti-science and, you know, and it's violating the postmodernism because what postmodernists were, they were radical skeptics, not just of, they were radical skeptics, not just of the way things were, but of their own beliefs. And social justice fundamentalism is not at all self-critical. It says that we have the answers, which is the opposite of what postmodernists would ever say. No, you just have another meta-narrative. And it's also violating, of course, the tradition of liberal social justice in a million ways because it's anti-liberal. And so this Frankenstein comes together. Meanwhile, liberal social justice doesn't have a Frankenstein. It's very clear. It's a crisp ideology that says we need, we're trying to make, we're trying to get to a more perfect union. They're trying to keep the promises made in the Constitution. And that's what it's trying to do. And so it's much simpler in a lot of ways. So you write that my big problem with social justice fundamentalism isn't the ideology itself. It's what its scholars and activists started to do sometimes around 2013, when they began to wield a cajol that's not supposed to have any place in the country like the US. So it's the actions, not the ideas, the implementations.

Well, to be clear, I don't like the ideology. I think it's a low-rung ideology. I think it's morally inconsistent based on, you know, it's flip-flops on its morals, depending on the group. I think it's echo chamber-y. I think it's full of inaccuracies and kind of can't stand up to debate. So I think it's a low, but there's a ton of low-rung ideologies I don't like. I don't like a lot of religious doctrines. I don't like a lot of political doctrines, right? The US is a place inherently that is a mishmash of a ton of ideologies, and I'm not going to like two-thirds of them at any given time. So my problem, the reason I'm writing about this is not because I'm like, by the way, this ideology is not something I like. That's not interesting. The reason that it must be written about right now, this particular ideology, is because it's not playing nicely with others. But if you want to be a hardcore evangelical Christian, the US says, live and let live. Not only are you allowed to have an echo chamber of some kind, it's actively protected here. Live and let live, they can do what they want, you do what you want. Now, if the evangelical Christians started saying, by the way, anyone who says anything that conflicts with evangelical Christianity is going to be severely socially punished, and they have the cultural power to do so, which they don't in this case. They might like you, but they don't have the power, but they're able to get anyone fired who they want, and they're able to actually change the curriculum in all of these schools and to suddenly not conflict with no more evolution in the textbooks because they don't want it. Now I would write a book about evangelical Christianity, because that's what every liberal, regardless of what you think of the actual horizontal beliefs, it doesn't matter what they believe. When they start violating live and let live, and shutting down other areas, other segments of society, and it's almost like it's not the best analogy, but an echo chamber is like a benign tumor, and what you have to watch out for is a tumor that starts to metastasize, starts to forcefully spread and damage the tissue around it, and that's what this particular ideology has been doing. Do you worry about it as an existential threat to liberalism in the West, in the United States? Is it a problem, or is it the biggest problem that's threatening all of human civilization? I would never, I would not say it's the biggest problem. It might be. If it turns out in 50 years, someone says actually it was, I wouldn't be shocked, but I also wouldn't bet on that because there's a lot of problems.

I'm a little sorry to interrupt. It is popular to say that kind of thing, though, and it's less

popular to say the same thing about AI or nuclear weapons, which worries me that I'm more worried about nuclear weapons even still than I am about wokeism. So I've gotten, I've had probably a thousand arguments about this. That's one nice thing about spending six years procrastinating on getting a book done is you end up test battle testing your ideas a million times. So I've heard this one a lot, which is there's kind of three groups of former Obama voters. One is super woke now. Another one is super anti-woke now, and the third is what you just said, which is sure, wokeness is over the top. You're not woke, but I think that the anti-woke people are totally lost their mind, and it's just not that big a deal. Now, here's why I disagree with that, because it's not wokeness itself. It's that a radical political movement of which there will always be a lot in the country has managed to do something that a radical movement is not supposed to be able to do in the US, which is they've managed to hijack institutions all across the country and hijack medical journals and universities and the ACLU, all the activist organizations and nonprofits and NGOs and many tech companies. So it's not that I think this thing is so bad. It's a little like we said with Trump. The reason Trump scares me is not because Trump's so bad. It's that because it reveals that we were vulnerable to a demagogue candidate. And what wokeness reveals to me is that we are currently, and until something changes, will continue to be vulnerable to a bully movement and a forcefully expansionist movement that wants

to actually destroy the workings, the liberal gears and tear them apart. And so here's the way I view a liberal democracy is it is a bunch of these institutions that were trial and error crafted over hundreds of years. And they all rely on trust, public trust, and a certain kind of feeling of unity that actually is critical to a liberal democracy's functioning. And what I see this thing is, is as a parasite on that, that whose goal is, and I'm not saying each individual in this is I don't think they're bad people. I think that it's the ideology itself has the property of its goal is to tear apart the pretty delicate workings of the liberal democracy and shred the critical lines of trust. And so you talk about AI and you talk about all these other big problems, nuclear, right? The reason I like writing about that stuff a lot more than I like writing about politics, this wasn't a fun topic for me, is because I realized that all of those things, if they were going to have a good future with those things and they're actually threats, like I said, we need to have our wits about us and we need the liberal gears and levers working, we need the liberal machine working. And so with something's threatening to undermine that, it affects everything else. We need to have our scientific mind about us, about these foundational ideas. But I guess my sense of hope comes from observing the immune system respond to wokeism. There seems to be a pro liberalism immune system. And not only that, so like there's intellectuals, there's people that are willing to do the fight, you talk about courage or being courageous. And there is a hunger for that, such that those ideas can become viral and they take over. So I just don't see a mechanism by which wokeism accelerates like exponentially and takes over, like it's expand. It feels like as it expands, the immune system responds. The immune system of liberalism, of basically a country in at least in the United States that still ultimately, at the core of the individual values, the freedom of speech, just freedoms in general, the freedom of an individual. But that's the battle. So to me, it is like a virus and an immune system. And I totally agree. I see the same story happening. And I'm sitting here rooting for the immune system. But you're still worried. Well, here's the thing. So a liberal democracy is

always going to be vulnerable to a movement like this, right? And there will be more, because it's not a totalitarian dictatorship, because if you can socially pressure people to not say what they're thinking, you can suddenly start to just take over, right? You can break the liberalism of the liberal democracy quite easily. And suddenly, a lot of things are illiberal. On the other hand, the same vulnerability, the same system that's vulnerable to that, also is hard to truly conquer. Because now the Maoists, right, similar kind of vibe, they were saying that science is evil and that the intellectuals are, it's all this big conspiracy. But they could murder you. And they had the hard cudgel in their hand, right? And the hard cudgel is scary. And you can conquer a country with the hard cudgel. But you can't use that in the US. So what they have is a soft cudgel, which can have the same effect initially. You can scare people into shutting up. You can't maybe imprison them and murder them. But if you can socially ostracize them and get them fired, that basically is going to have the same effect. So the soft cudgel can have the same effect for a while. But the thing is, it's a little bit of a house of cards, because it relies on fear. And as soon as that fear goes away, the whole thing falls apart, right? The soft cudgel requires people to be so scared of getting canceled or getting whatever. And as soon as some people start, you know, Toby Lutka of Shopify, I always like, think about, you know, he just said, you know what, I'm not scared of this soft cudgel and spoke up and said, we're not political at this company and we're not a family, we're a team and we're going to do this. And you know what, like, they're thriving. He will be on this podcast. This seems like a fascinating. He's amazing. He spoke up. He's one of the smartest and like kindest dudes, but he's also, he has courage at a time when it's hard. But here's the thing, is that it's different than that you need so much less courage against a soft cudgel than you do. The Iranians throwing their hijabs into the fire, those people's courage just blows away any courage we have here, because they might get executed. That's the thing is that you can actually have courage right now. And it's, so don't worry about it. Oh man, the irony of that. And you talk about, so two things to fight this, there's two things, awareness and courage. What's the awareness piece? The awareness piece is, is under first, just no understanding the stakes, like getting your heads out of the sand and being like, technology is blowing up exponentially. Our society's trust is devolving. Like we're kind of falling apart in some important ways. We're losing our grip on some stability at the worst time. That's the first point, just a big picture. And then also awareness of, I think this vertical axis or whatever your version of it is, this concept of how do I really form my beliefs? Where do they actually come from? Are they someone else's beliefs? Am I following a checklist? How about my values? I used to identify with the blue party or the red party, but now they've changed. And I suddenly am okay with that. Is that because my values changed with it? Or am I actually anchored to the party, not to any principle? Asking yourself these questions. Asking you, looking for where do I feel disgusted by fellow human beings? Maybe I'm being a crazy tribal person without realizing it. How about the people around me? Am I being bullied by some echo chamber without realizing it? Am I the bully somewhere? I think just to kind of do a self audit. And I think that just some awareness like that, just a self audit about these things can go a long way. But if you keep it to yourself, it's almost useless. Because if you don't have, awareness without courage does very little. So courage is when you take that awareness and you actually export it out into the world. And

it starts affecting other people. And so courage can happen on multiple levels. It can happen by, first of all, just stop saying stuff you don't believe. If you're being pressured by a kind of an ideology or a movement to say stuff that you don't actually believe, just stop, just stand your ground and don't say anything. That's courage. That's one first step. Start speaking out in small groups. Start actually speaking your mind. See what happens. The sky doesn't usually fall. Actually, people usually respect you for it. And it's not every group, but you'd be surprised. And then eventually, maybe start speaking out in bigger groups. Start going public. Go public with it. And you don't need everyone doing this. Some people will lose their jobs for it. I'm not talking to those people. Most people won't lose their jobs, but they have the same fear as if they would. And it's like, what? Are you going to get criticized or are you going to get a bunch of people, angry Twitter people will criticize you? Like, yeah, it's not pleasant. But actually, that's a little bit like our primitive minds fear that really back when it was programmed, that kind of ostracism or criticism will get leave you out of the tribe and you'll die. Today, it's kind of a delusional fear. It's not actually that scary. And the people who have realized that can exercise incredible leadership right now. So you have a really interesting description of censorship, of self-censorship also, as you've been talking about, who's King Mustache? And this gap, I think, I hope you write even more, even more than you've written in the book about these ideas, because it's so strong. This censorship gaps that are created between the dormant thought pile and the kind of thing under the speech curve. Yeah. So first of all, I like to think of, I think it's a useful tool, is this thing called a thought pile, which is if you have a, on any given issue, you have a horizontal spectrum. And just say I could take your brain out of your head and I put it on the thought pile right where you happen to believe about that issue. Now, I did that for everyone in the community or in a society. And you're going to end up with a big mushy pile that I think will often form a bell curve. If it's really politicized, it might form like a camel with two humps, because it's concentrated here. But for a typical issue, it'll just form a fear of AI, you're going to have a bell curve, right? Things like this. That's the thought pile. Now, the second thing is a line that I call the speech curve, which is what people are saying. So the speech curve is high when not just a lot of people are saying it, but it's being said from the biggest platforms, being said in the New York Times and it's being said by the president on the state of the Union. Those things are the top of the speech curve. And then when the speech curve is lower, it means it's being said either whispered in small groups or it's just not very many people are talking about it. Now, a free speech democracy is healthy on a certain topic. You've got the speech curve sitting right on top of the thought pile. They mirror each other, which is naturally what would happen. More people think something is going to be said more often than from higher platforms. What censorship does, and censorship can be from the government. So I use the tale of King Moustache and King Moustache, he's a little tiny tyrant and he's very sensitive and people are making fun of his moustache and they're saying he's not a good king and he does not like that. So what does he do? He enacts a policy and he says, anyone who has heard criticizing me or my moustache or my rule will be put to death. And immediately at the town was because his father was a very liberal. It was always free speech in his kingdom. But now King Moustache has taken over and he's saying this is a new rules now. And so a few people yell out and say, that's not how we do things here. And that moment

is what I call a moment of truth. Did the Kings guards stand with the principles of the kingdom and say, yeah, King Moustache, it's not what we do, in which case he would kind of have to, he's not that he can do, or are they going to execute. So in this case, it's as if he laid down an electric fence over a part of the thought pile and said no one's allowed to speak over here, the speech curve. Maybe people will think these things, but the speech curve cannot go over here. But the electric fence wasn't actually electrified until the Kings guards in a moment of truth get scared and say, okay, and they hang the five people who spoke out. So in that moment, that fence just became electric. And now no one criticizes King Moustache anymore.

So I use this as an allegory. Now, of course, he has a hard cudgel because he can execute people. But now when we look at the US, what you're seeing right now is a lot of pressure, which is very similar. An electric fence is being laid down saying no one can criticize these ideas. And if you do, you won't be executed, you'll be canceled. You'll be fired. Now, is that fence electrified from there? No, they can't actually, they're not working the company, they can't fire you. But they can start a Twitter mob when someone violates that speech curve, when someone violates that speech rule. And then the leadership of the company has the moment of truth. And what the leaders should do is stand up for their company's values, which is almost always in favor of the employee and say, look, even if they made a mistake, they make people make mistakes, we're not going to fire them. Or maybe that person actually said something that's reasonable and we should discuss it. But either way, we're not going to fire them. And if they said no, what happens is the Twitter mob actually doesn't have, they can't execute you, they go away. And the fence has proven to have no electricity. What's been the problem with the past few years is what's happened again and again, is the leader gets scared and they get scared of the Twitter mob when they fire them. Boom, that fence has electricity. And now, actually, if you cross that, it's not just a threat, like you will have, you'll be out of a job. Like it's really bad, like you'll have a huge penalty, you might not be able to feed your kids. So that's an electric fence that goes up. Now, what happens when an electric fence goes up and it's proven to actually be electrified, the speech curve morphs into a totally different position. And now these new people say, instead of having the marketplace of ideas that turns into a natural bell curve, they say, no, no, no, these ideas are okay to say, not just okay, you'll be socially rewarded. And these ones don't. That's the rules of their own echo chamber that they're now applying to everyone and it's working. And so the speech curve distorts. And so you end up with now, instead of one region, which is a region of active communal thinking, what people are thinking and saying, you now have three regions.

You have a little active communal thinking, but mostly you now have this dormant thought pile, which is all these opinions that suddenly everyone's scared to say out loud.

Everyone's thinking, but they're scared to say out loud.

Everyone's thinking, but no one's saying. And then you have this other region, which is this, the approved ideas of this now cultural kind of dictator. And those are being spoken from the largest platforms and they're being repeated by the president and they're being repeated all over the place, even though people don't believe it. And that's this distortion. And what happens is the society becomes really stupid because active communal thinking is the region

where we can actually think together. And now no one can think together and it gets siloed into small private conversations. It's really powerful what you said about institutions and so on. It's not trivial to, from a leadership position to be like, no, we defend the employee or defend the, yeah, the employee, the person with us on our, like, because we don't, there's, because there's no actual ground to the, any kind of violation we're hearing about. So the mob, they resist the mob. It's ultimately to the leader, I guess, of a particular institution of a particular company. And it's difficult. Oh yeah. No, no, it's not. If it were easy, it wouldn't, there wouldn't be all of these failings. And by the way, this is, that's the immune system failing. That's the liberal immune system of that company failing, but also then it's an example, which means that a lot of other, you know, it's failing to the country. It's not easy. Of course, it's not because, because we have primitive minds that are wired to care so much about what people think of us.

And even if we're not going to, you know, maybe, first of all, we're scared that it's going to start a, because there's, you know, what, you know, what, what do mobs do? They don't just say, I'm going to criticize you. I'm going to criticize anyone who still buys your product. I'm going to criticize anyone who goes on your podcast. So it's not just you. It's now suddenly, if, if, if, if, if Lex becomes tarnished enough, now I go on the podcast and people are saying, oh, I'm not buying his book. And when I'm Lex Friedman, no, no thanks. Right. And now I get, it's a call, I call it a smear web. Like you've been smeared and it's so, we're in such a, you know, bad time that it smeared travels to me. And now meanwhile, someone who buys my book and tries to share it, someone says, you're buying that guy's book. You know, he goes on Lex Friedman. You see how this happens, right? So that hasn't happened in this case. But that, so we are so wired, not an A, that is kind of bad, right? Like that is actually like bad for you. But, but we're wired to care about it so much because it meant life or death back in the day. Yeah. Yeah. And luckily in this case, we're both probably can smear each other in this conversation. This is wonderful. I smear you all the time. Given, given the nature of your book. What, what do you think about freedom of speech as a term and as an idea, as a way to resist the mechanism, this mechanism of dormant thought pile and artificially generated speech, this ideal of the freedom of speech and protecting speech and celebrating speech. Yeah. Well, so this is, this is kind of the point I was talking about earlier about King Westash made a rule against for, he's created official.

Guys, just, I just love the, one of the amazing things about your book, as you get later and later in the book, you cover more and more difficult issues as a way to illustrate the importance of the vertical perspective. But there's something about using hilarious drawings throughout that make it much more fun. And it, it takes you away from the personal somehow. And you start thinking in the space of ideas versus like outside of the tribal type of thinking. So it's a really brilliant, I mean, I would advise for anybody to do con when they write controversial books to have hilarious drawings. It's true. Like put the silly stick figure in your thing and it, it lightens, it does it lightens the mood. It gets people's guard down a little bit. Yeah. You know, and it works. It reminds people that like, we're all friends here. Right? Like, we're, you know, let's like laugh, you know, laugh at ourselves, laugh at the, laugh at the fact that we're like in a culture war a little bit and now we can talk about it, right? As opposed to like getting like religious about it. But, but basically like King Westash

had no First Amendment. He said we, the government is censoring, right? Which is very common around

the world, right? Government censor all them. The US, you know, again, there's some, you can argue there's some controversial things recently, but basically the US, the First Amendment isn't the problem, right? No one is being arrested for saying the wrong thing, but this graph is still happening. And so, so freedom of speech, when people, what, what, if, what people like to say is if someone's camp, you know, planning about a cancel culture and saying, you know, this is, this is, you know, an anti free speech, people like to point out, no, it's not the government's not arresting you for anything. This is called like, you know, the free market, buddy, like this is called, you know, you're, you're putting your ideas out and you're getting criticized and your precious marketplace of ideas, there it is, right? And I've gotten this a lot. And this is not making a critical distinction between cancel culture and criticism culture. Criticism culture is a little bit of this kind of high rung idea lab stuff we talked about. Criticism culture attacks the idea and, and, and, and encourages further discussion, right? It enlivens discussion. It makes everyone smarter. Cancel culture attacks the person. Very different. Can't criticism culture says, here's why this idea is so bad. Let me tell you. Cancel culture says, here's why this person is bad and no one should talk to them and they should be fired. And what does that do? It doesn't enliven

the discussion. It makes everyone scared to talk and it's the opposite. It shuts down discussion. So you still have your first amendment, but first amendment plus cancel culture equals, you might as well be in King must, you might as well have government censorship, right? First amendment plus criticism culture, great. Now you have this vibrant marketplace of ideas. So there's a very clear difference. And so when, when people criticize the cancel culture and then someone says, oh, see, you're so sensitive now, you look, you're doing the cancel culture yourself, you're trying to punish this person for critics like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Every good liberal and I, and I mean that in the lower case, which is that anyone who believes in liberal democracies, regardless of what they believe should stand up and say, no to cancel culture and say, this is not okay, regardless of what the actual topic is. And that makes them a good liberal versus if they're trying to cancel someone who's just criticizing, they're doing the opposite. Now they're shutting. So it's the opposite things, but it's very easy to get confused. You can see people take advantage of the, and sometimes they just don't know it themselves. The lines here can be very confusing. The wording can be very confusing and without that wording, some suddenly it looks like someone who's criticizing cancel culture is canceling, but they're not. You applied this thinking to universities in particular, that there's a great, yet another great image on the trade off between knowledge and conviction. And it's what's commonly, actually it can maybe explain to me the difference, but it's often referred to as the Dunning-Kruger effect where you, when you first learn of a thing, you have an extremely high confidence about self estimation of how well you understand that thing. You actually say that Dunning-Kruger means something else. So yeah, it's everyone I post this, everyone's like Dunning-Kruger and it's what everyone thinks Dunning-Kruger is. Dunning-Kruger is a little different. It's you have a diagonal line like this one, which is the place you are. I call it like the humility tightrope, but the humility sweet spot. It's exactly the right level of humility based on what you know. If you're below it, you're insecure. You actually have too much

humility. You don't have enough confidence because you know more than you're giving yourself credit

for. And when you're above the line, you're in the arrogant zone. You need a dose of humility. You think you know more than you do. So we all want to stay on that tightrope. And Dunning-Kruger is basically a straight line that has a lower slope. So you start off, you're still getting more confident as you go along, but you start off above that line. And as you learn more, you end up below the line later. So this wavy thing. This wavy thing is a different phenomenon. And it's just related. So this idea, so for people just listening, there's a child's hill, pretty damn sure you know a whole lot and feeling great about it. That's in the beginning. And then there's an insecure canyon. You crash down, acknowledging that you don't know that much. And then there's a growth mountain. Grown-up mountain.

Grown-up mountain. Where after you feel ashamed and embarrassed about not knowing that much, you begin to realize that knowing how little you know is the first step in becoming someone who actually knows stuff. And that's the grown-up mountain. And you climb and climb and climb. You're saying that in universities, we're pinning people at the top of the child's hill. So for me, this is very, I think of myself with this, because I went to college, like a lot of 18-year-olds, and I was very cocky. I just thought I knew it. And when it came to politics, I was like bright blue, just because I grew up in a bright blue suburb. And I wasn't thinking that hard about it. And I thought that, you know, and what I did when I went to college is met a lot of smart conservatives and a lot of smart progressives. But I've met a lot of people who weren't just going down a checklist and they knew stuff. And when I, and suddenly I realized that like a lot of these views I have are not based on knowledge. They're based on other people's conviction. Everyone else thinks that's true. So now I think it's, whoa, I'm actually like, I'm, I'm transferring someone else's conviction to me. And who knows why they have conviction? They might have conviction because they're transferring from someone else. And I'm a smart dude, I thought. Why am I, why am I like giving away my own independent, you know, learning abilities here and just adopting other views? So anyway, it was this humbling experience. And it wasn't just about politics, by the way. It was that I had strong views about a lot of stuff. And I just, I got lucky or not lucky. I sought out, you know, the kind of people I sought out were the type that loved to disagree and they were, man, they knew stuff. And so you're quickly in, you know, in, again, an ideal lab culture, it was an ideal lab. And also, I also went to, I started getting in the habit, I started loving listening to people who disagreed with me because it was so exhilarating listening to a smart person. When I thought there was no, no credence to this other argument, right? The, this side of this debate is obviously wrong. I wanted to see an intelligence squared on that debate in particular. I wanted to go see, I actually got into intelligence squared in college. I wanted to see a smart person who disagrees with me talk. It became so fascinating to me, right? It was the most interesting thing. That was a new thing. I didn't think I liked that. And so what did that do? That, that shoved me down the humble tumble here. Number three, it shoved me down where I started to, and then I, and then I went the other way where I realized that I had been, a lot of my identity had been based on this faux feeling of knowledge, this idea that I thought I knew everything. Now that I don't have that, I was like, I felt really like dumb and I felt really almost like embarrassed of what I knew. And so that's where I call this

insecure canyon. I think it's sometimes when you're so used to thinking, you know everything and then

you realize you don't, it's like, it's, and then you start to realize that actually really awesome thinkers, they, they, they don't judge me for this. They totally respect if I say, I don't know anything about this and say, Oh, cool. You should read this and this and this. They don't say you don't know anything. They don't say that, right? And so, and not that I'm, by the way, this is not to say, I'm now on grown up mountain and you should all join me. I am often find myself drifting up with like a helium balloon. Oh, I think I read about the new thing. And suddenly I think I have all, I think I, you know, I read three things about, you know, a new AI thing. And I'm like, I'll go do a talk on this. I'm like, no, I won't. I don't, I just, I'm going to just be spouting out the opinion of the person I just read. So I have to remind myself, but it's useful. Now what, the reason my problem with colleges today is that it's, I was a graduate in 2004. This is a recent change is that all of those speakers I went who disagreed with me, a lot of them were conservative. So many of those speakers would not be allowed on campuses today. And so many of the discussions I

had were in big groups or classrooms. And this is still, you know, this was a liberal campus. So many of those disagreements, they're not happening today. And you, I've interviewed a ton of college students. It's chilly. It is, you know, people keep to themselves. So what's happening is not only are people losing that push off the child's hill, which was so valuable to me, so valuable to me as a thinker. It kind of started my life as a better thinker. They're losing that, but actually what college, a lot of the college classes and the vibe in colleges, a lot of what is now saying that there is one right set of views. And it's this kind of, you know, woke ideology. And it's right. And anyone who disagrees with it is bad. And anyone, and, and, and don't speak up, you know, unless you're going to agree with it. It's teaching people that child's hills that, you know, it's, it's nailing people's feet to child's hill.

It's teaching people that these are right. This views are right. And like,

you don't have any, nothing to, you should feel a complete conviction about them.

Yeah. How do we fix it? Is it, is it part of the administration? Is it part of the culture? Is it part of the, is it part of like actually instilling in the individual, like 18 year olds, the idea that this is the beautiful way to live is to embrace the disagreement and the growth from that?

It's awareness and courage. It's the same thing. So first of all, just get, when that awareness is people need to see what's happening here, that kids are getting, losing the, they're not going to college and becoming better, tougher, more robust thinkers. They're actually going to college and becoming zealots. They're getting taught to be zealots. And the, and the website still advertises, you know, wide variety of, you know, the website is a bait and switch.

You list all the universities. Yeah. It's a bait and switch. It's, it's still saying,

here you're coming here for a wide intellectual, basically they're advertising,

this is an idea lab and you get there and it's like, actually it's an echo chamber that you're paying money for. So if people realize that they start to get mad, hopefully, and then courage, I mean, starts, you know, yes, brave students. There's been some very brave students who have started, you know, big think clubs and stuff like that where it's like, we're going to have, you know, present both sides of a debate here. And that, that takes courage, but also courage and leadership. Like the, the, it's, it's, it's like, if you look at these colleges, it's specifically

the leaders who show strength, who get, who get the best results. Remember the, the cultural is soft. So if a leader of one of these places says, you know, the college presidents who have shown some strength, they actually don't get as much trouble. It's the ones who pander, the ones who, um, uh, in that, you know, in that moment of truth, they, they, they shrink away, then they get a lot more trouble. The mob smells blood. For the listener, uh, the, the podcast favorite Liv Burry just entered and your friend just entered the room. Uh, do you mind if she joins us? Please. I think there's a story she has about you. So Liv, you mentioned something that there's a funny story about, we haven't talked at all about the actual process of writing the book. Is, is there, you guys made a bet of some kind? Yeah. Is this a true story? Is this a completely false fabric? No, no, it's, it's true. Liv is, she's mean when you, I didn't, I did not know mean live. She's like, she's like a bully. She's like scary. I have to have that, I have that screenshot. So, so Liv was FaceTiming me and she was like, she was like being intimidating. I took a screenshot and I made it my phone background. So every time I opened it, I was like, ah. So to give the background of this, it's because, if you hadn't noticed, Tim started writing this book, how many years ago? Six? 2016, mid 2016. Right. As, as sort of a response to like the Trump stuff. Not, not even, yeah, it was just supposed to be a mini post. I was like, oh, I'm so like, I was like, I'm looking at all these like future tech things and I feel this like uneasiness, like, ah, we're going to like mess up all these things. Why? There's like some cloud over our society. Let me just write a mini post and I opened it up to WordPress to write a one day little essay and things went. On politics. It was going to be on like this feeling I had that, that like this feeling I had that we were, our tech was, was just growing and growing and we were becoming less wise. What's up? What's up with that? And I just wanted to write like, just like a little, like a little thousand word essay on like something I think we should pay attention to. And that was the beginning of this six year nightmare. Did you anticipate also the blog post will take a long while? I don't remember the process fully in terms of, I remember you saying, oh, I'm actually writing, this is, it's turning into a bigger thing. And I was like, you know, because the more we talked about it, we were talking about it. I was like, oh, this goes deep because I didn't really understand the full scope of the situation, you know, like nowhere near. And you sort of explained it. And I was like, ah, okay, yeah, I see that. And then the more we dug into it, the sort of the deeper and deeper and deeper it went. But no, I did not anticipate it would be six years. Let's put it that way. And when was your TED Talk on procrastination? So that was, that was March of 2016. And I started this book three months later and fell into the biggest procrastination hole that I've ever fallen into. Oh, wow. The irony isn't lost on me. I mean, it's like, it's, I just like, I like how much credit I have as, as for that TED Talk. I'm like, I am legit procrastinator. That is, I'm not just saying it. Like, it wasn't just that, because I mean, you did, you know, you did intend it to start out as a blog post, but then you're like, actually, this needs to be multiple. Actually, let's make it into a full series. You know what, I'll turn it into a book. And then that's where. And, and, and what also would live witnessed a few times, and my wife has witnessed like 30 of these is like, these, these 180 epiphanies, where I'll be like, I'll like, I'll have a moment when I'm, and I don't know what, you know, sometimes it's that there's a really good idea. Sometimes it's like, I'm just dreading having to finish this the way it is. And so there's epiphanies where it's

like, you know what, I need to start over from the beginning and just make this like a short, like 20 little blog post list. And then I'll do that. And then I was like, no, no, no, I have like a new epiphany. I have to, and it's these, and, and yeah, it's kind of like the crazy person a little bit. But anyway, can I tell the story of the, the bed? Go for it. All right. So things came to a head when we were in, we were all in vacation in Dominican Republic, Tim and his wife, me and Igor. And we were in the ocean. And I remember you'd been in the ocean for like an hour, just bobbing in there, becoming it. And we got talking and we were talking about the book. And you know, you were expressing just like this, you know, just the horror of the, of the situation, basically, you're like, look, I just, I'm so close, but there's still this and then there's this. And an idea popped into my head, which is the, you know, poker players often, we, we will set ourselves like negative bets, you know, like, essentially, if we don't get a job done, then we have to do something we really don't want to do. So instead of having a carrot, like a really, really big stick. So I had the idea to ask Tim, okay, what is the worst either organization or individual that you, if you had to, you know, that you would loathe to give a large sum of money to? And he thought about it for a little while and he gave his answer. And I was like, all right, what's your net worth? He said his net worth. All right, 10% of your net worth to that thing, if you don't get the draft, because oh, that's all right. But just before that, I'd ask him, how long, like, if you had a gun to your head, or to your wife's head, and you had to get the booked into a state where you could like send off an edit to the, a draft to your editor, how long? And he's like, oh, I guess like, I could get it like 95% good in a month. I was like, okay, great. And one month's time, if you do not have that edit handed in, there's draft, hand it in, really scary, 10% of your net worth is going to this thing that you really, really think is terrible. But you're forgetting the kicker. The kicker was that, because, you know, procrastinators, they self-defeat. That's what they do. And then Liv says, I'm going to sweeten the deal. And I am going to basically match you. And I'm going to put in, I'm going to send a huge amount of my own money there if you don't do it. So, and I can't, that's, that would be really bad. So, not only are you screwing yourself, you're screwing a friend. And she, and she was like, and as your friend, because I'm your friend, I will send it. I will send the money. I mean, like, that, you know, like tyranny. And I got the draft in. I got the draft in. Just. Just. I know. Well, I was. The ego can attest to this. Like, actually, it was, it was funny because it was, it was like supposed to be by the summer solstice or whatever it was. It was like a certain date. And. It was like four hours. I got it at four. No, I got it at four a.m., like the next morning. But then, and, and, and, and they were both like, that doesn't count. I'm like, it does. It's still, for me, it's the same day still. It's okay. Can you imagine how fucked in the head you have to be? Yeah. So, like, literally technically pass the deadline by four hours for an obscene amount of money to a thing you loathe. That's how bad his, his, his sickness is. Because I knew the hard, hard deadline. I knew that there was no way she was going to actually send that money at, because it was four a.m. So I knew I actually had the whole night. So, yeah. I should actually punish you and just, I should send, I should send like a nominal amount to that thing. No, thanks. No. But. Is there some micro, like, lessons from that, from how to avoid procrastination and writing a book that you've learned? Yes. Well, I've learned a lot of things. I mean, like first, don't take, don't write like a dissertation about like proving some

grand theory of society because that's really procrastinating. Like, I would have been an awful PhD student for that reason. And so, like, I'm going to do another book and it's going to be like a bunch of short chapters that are one-offs because that's like, it just doesn't feed into procrastination. But your book is like a giant, like, framework. There is grand theories all through your book. I know. And I learned not to do that again. I did it once. I don't want to do it again. Oh, with the book, with the mistake. Yeah, yeah. So the book is a giant mistake. Yes. Don't do another one of this. Look, some people should. It's just not for me. You just did it. I know. And it almost killed me. Okay. So that's the first one. But secondly, yeah, like, basically, there's two ways to fix procrastination. One is you fix, it's like a picture, you have a boat that's leaking and it's not working very well. You can fix it in two ways. You can get your hammer and nails out and your boards and actually fix the boat. Or you can duct tape it for now to get yourself across the river, but it's not actually fixed. So ideally, down the road, I have repaired whatever kind of bizarre mental illness that I have that makes me procrastinate in a very like, I just don't self-defeat in this way anymore. But in the meantime, I can duct tape the boat by bringing what I call the panic monster into the situation via things like this and this scary person and having external pressure to have external pressure of some kind is critical for me. It's, yes, I don't have the muscle to do the work I need to do without external pressure. By the way, Liv, is there a possible future where you write a book? And meanwhile, by the way, huge procrastination. That's the funny thing about this. How long did your last video take? Oh my God. Is there advice that you give to Liv, how to get the videos done faster? Well, it would be the same exact thing. Actually, I can give good procrastination advice. Panic monster? Yeah. Well, we should do it together. It should be like we have this date, but you know, it's- We should actually just do another bet. I have to have my script done by this time. Yes. I got to get the third part out. Because then you'll actually do it. And it's not the thing is the time, but it's like, if you could take three weeks on a video and instead you take 10 weeks, it's not like, oh, well, I also, I'm having more fun in those 10 weeks. The whole 10 weeks are bad. Yeah, it's torture. Bad. So you're just having a bad time and you're getting less work done and less work out. And it's not like you're enjoying your personal life. It's bad for your relationships, it's bad for your own- But you keep doing it anyway. Yeah. Well, a lot of people have troubles keeping a diet, right? Yeah. Primitive mind. Why'd you point at me when you said that? That was offensive. What's your procrastination weakness? Do you have one? Everything. What's he doing right now? Everything. Everything. Preparing for a conversation. I had your book, amazing book. I really enjoyed it. I started reading it. I was like, this is awesome. It's so awesome that I'm going to save it when I'm behind a computer and can take notes, like good notes. Of course, that resulted in like last minute, everything. Everything I'm doing in my life. Not everyone's like that. People self-defeat in different ways. Some people don't have this particular problem. Adam Grant is a, he calls himself a pre-crastinator where he gets an assignment, he will go home and do it until it's done and handed it, which is also not necessarily good. It's like you're rushing it either way, but it's better. But some people have the opposite thing where the looming deadline makes them so anxious that they go and fix it. And the procrastinator, I think, has a similar anxiety, but they solve it in a totally different way.

Well, they don't solve it. They just live with the anxiety.

Right. They just live with the anxiety. Now, I think there's an even bigger group of people.

So there's these people that Adam Grant's, there's people like me. And then there's people who have a healthy relationship with deadlines, but they're still part of a bigger group of people that actually they need a deadline there to do something. So they actually, they still are motivated by a deadline. And as soon as you have all the things in life that don't have a deadline, like working out and like working on that album, you want it to write, they don't do anything either. So there's actually like, that's why procrastination is a much bigger problem than people realize because it's not just the funny last second people. It's anyone who actually can't get things done that don't have a deadline.

But you dedicate your book quote to Tannis, who never planned on being married to someone who would spend six years talking about his book on politics. But here we are. What's the secret to a successful relationship with a procrastinator? That's maybe for both of you.

Well, I think the first most important thing. You already started with a political answer.

I can tell. Okay, go ahead. No, the first and most important thing is because people who don't procrastinate, if you don't, it's like, you will, the people in the instinct is to judge it as like, that's either either just think, think they're just being like a loser or they're taking it, they'll take it personally, you know, and instead to see this as like, this is, this is a some form of addiction or some form of ailment, you know, they're not just being a dick, right?

Like they have a problem and so some compassion, but then also maybe finding that line where you can, you know, maybe apply some tough love, some middle ground. On the other hand, you might say

that, you know, you don't want the, the significant other relationship where it's like, they're the one nagging you. Maybe that's, you don't want them even being part of that. And I think maybe it's, you know, better to have a live do it instead. Right. Having someone who can like create the infrastructure where they aren't the direct stick, you need a bit of carrot and stick, right?

Maybe they can be the person who keeps reminding them of the carrot and then they set up the friend

group to be the stick. And then that keeps your relationship. Yeah. In a good place.

Stick like looming in the background. That's your friend group. Okay. At the beginning of the conversation, we talked about how all of human history can be presented as a 1000 page book. What are you excited about for the 1000s?

Probably say that first page. So the next 250 years. What are you most excited about?

I'm most excited about, have you read The Fable of the Dragon? Okay. Well, it's an allegory for death. And it's, you know, Nick Bostrom. And he talks about the, he compares death to a dragon that eats 60 million people or whatever the number is every year. And you just every year, we shepherd those people up and they feed them to the dragon and that there's a Stockholm syndrome

when we say that's just a lot of man. And that's what we have to do. And anyone who says maybe we should try to beat the dragon, they get called vain and narcissistic. But someone who tries to, someone who goes, does chemo, no one calls them vain or narcissistic, they say they're, they're, you know, good, good for you, right? You're a hero. You're, you're, you're fighting, fighting the good fight. So I think there's some disconnect here. And I think that if we can

get out of that Stockholm syndrome and realize that death is just the machine, the human physical machine failing, and that there's no law of nature that says you can't, with enough technology, repair the machine and keep it going until no one, I don't think anyone wants to live forever. People think they do, no one does, but until people are ready. And I think when we hit a world where we can, we have enough tech that we can continue to keep the human machine alive until the person says, I'm done. I'm ready. I think we will look back and we will think that anything before that time, that'll be the real ADBC, you know, we'll look back at BC before the big advancement.

And it'll seem so sad and so heartbreaking, barbaric. And people will say, I can't believe that humans like us had to live with that when they lost loved ones and they died before they died before they were ready. I think that's the ultimate achievement, but we need to stop criticizing and smearing people who you talk about it.

So you think that's actually doable in the next 250 years?

A lot happens in 250 years, especially when technology is really exponentially, yeah.

And you think humans would be around versus AI completely takes over, where mortality means something completely different. I mean, look, the optimist in me and maybe the stupid kind of 2023 person in me says, yeah, of course, we'll make it. We'll figure it out. But you know,

I mean, we are going into a great, you know, I have a friend who knows as much about the future as anyone I know. I mean, he's really, he's a big investor in future tech. And he's really on the pulse of things. And he just says, future is going to be weird. That's what he says. Future is going to be weird. And it's going to be weird. Don't look at the last few decades of your life and apply that for it and say, that's just what life is like. No, no, no, it's going to be weird and different. Well, some of my favorite things in this world are weird. And speaking of which, it's good to have this conversation. It's good to have you as friends. This was an incredible one. Thanks for coming back and live. Thanks for talking with me a bunch more times. This was awesome.

Thank you, Lex. Thank you. Thanks for listening to this conversation with Tim Urban. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now let me leave you with some words from Winston Churchill. When there's no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you.

Thank you for listening and hope to see you next time.