

[Transcript] Leading / 41. Reid Hoffman: Bankrolling Biden to beat Trump, the "PayPal Mafia", and Musk's messiah complex

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Welcome to The Rest is Politics, leading with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell.

And I am very, very pleased today that we have, for I think almost the first time, a genuine friend of mine on the podcast. There have been many grand individuals on before, but I don't think anybody who's as close a friend as Reid is. And we'll see how this goes, whether this affects the objectivity of my interviewing style. Alistair has had some very close friends on the podcast already in the shape of Tony Blair and David Miliband. So we'll see what this does to us. Reid is often described as the co-founder of LinkedIn, which is one of the, I guess, the biggest companies he's associated with. He's also founded now one of the leading AI companies. But he's been very much part of the whole story of Silicon Valley since the late 90s. He's also somebody who is a serious public intellectual. He's serious about philosophy. He's been thinking a lot about friendship. He cares deeply about politics, been very, very active in the campaigns against Donald Trump, and is now right at the heart of the AI debate. So he seems to put himself in the center of most of the biggest issues going on. So thank you, Reid, very, very much for joining us.

It is awesome to be here. And thank you for having me.

Brory mentioned the fact that you were at the heart of Silicon Valley. You were born in the heart of Silicon Valley. Is that right?

That's right. I was born in Stanford Hospital, and it entertained my father to no end that when I was attending Stanford as an undergraduate, it said, birthplace unknown.

Oh, wow. So, and your parents, what was it in your parents, do you think, that made you into the person that you are, in terms of where your life has gone, very different in a way from the background you came from?

Yeah. Well, part of the thing that I think is great about California, and both my parents are children of California, is that you kind of have this individualism of you can invent yourself.

It's obviously classically American in some ways, but it's the kind of the,

you know, discover your own path. And I hadn't realized how California and I was in certain ways until I actually went and studied at Oxford. And then I was like, oh,

I am pretty different here. And, you know, I obviously intellectually kind of knew that.

And I think that both of them were seeing how to make their own path. They were with lawyers going into kind of high intellect professions, you know, kind of making their way in the world by going out of kind of a, call it, you know, a lower middle class background to do that. And I think that was all instrumental. But I think it mostly was, find your own path was, I think, probably the thing that kind of most, I don't know, set me on the path that I've ended up finding myself on.

And Reid, your parents mostly on the left? I mean, I've been reading this book,

The Founders, which describes this amazing moment in your life when you were one of the founders of PayPal, where you end up with Elon Musk and Peter Thiel and all these people who then go on to be very famous colleagues in Silicon Valley. But in it, it describes you going into student politics in Stanford and being in seminars with Peter Thiel. And the impression it gives

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is that you were very much more on the left and he was more on the right. Was that something from your parents? Probably as a set off, yes. You know, my mom started the ecological law quarterly at the University of California Berkeley Law School. My dad's first job after Stanford law was kind of working for what is known as public interest law, which is essentially working for low income people to help them get their rights. And all of that was kind of like, we want to have a greater society that cares about the broader set of people. And by the way, being raised in the San Francisco Bay Area in Silicon Valley, Berkeley, obviously I had a whole stack of my default views are, you know, American gun laws or nuts, you know, et cetera, you know, as kind of things. So yes, you know, kind of raised, you know, lefty, although more in the discussion of how do we make society the way that we would want it to be, then, you know, kind of call it lefty, you know, genuine socialists, not the use of the buzzword, but the question of like, we're trying to make a greater society. Well, by certainly by American standards, I think I would be considered a bit of a lefty. And the motto of our podcast read is disagree agreeably. One of the things that Roy and I disagree about is that I profoundly believe that private education is a very bad thing. I never blame the children because it's always the parents that want them to go to private schools. But you had two parents who wanted you to go to state schools and what you call public schools, but you wanted to travel aboard a private school. So what the hell was going on there? I could tell already from the beginning of your question where you were going. And, you know, my sense was trying to get the best possible education I can because of elevating humanity. And I do obviously share the principle that we would like that to be as broadly accessible and available to everyone as much as possible. So you as a child, you were thinking of elevating humanity? Well, elevating at least my own capabilities. Now, I did get to thinking about humanity very early, partially because I read a lot of science fiction. And so thinking about that kind of space opera grand scope was one of the things that was but it didn't connect it to me until I got to Stanford. So like, I didn't have that that kind of view of the much broader. And my writing saying that many of the key voices around Silicon Valley also like science fiction, that there's a connection between the kind of mindset of one and the other. And give us a sense of that. I mean, the other people that listens will have heard of who were into science fiction, how did an interest in science fiction help form their characters and their businesses? Well, I think there's a couple of really great ways of looking at it. So one is you think on the scale of humanity, because almost all of these things are, you know, where does humanity go from anything from the next five years, next 300 years, or far into the future? Two, as you think about what's possible in terms of, of like, well, how could things progress be very different? You know, there's an inherent progressiveness, even though there's a number of science fiction writers who are conservative politically progressiveness, because how could the world be different in X years from now? And how do we, and what makes it so? What technological evolution makes it so? What social evolution, you know, social systems dune by Frank Herbert, etc. And I'd say more or less, 90 plus percent, maybe even 95 percent of the technology inventors here in Silicon Valley, you can trade discussions around science fiction and say, you know, when you were reading David Brin's uplift series, what did you think about? Just for the listeners who've not been to California, who don't know Silicon Valley, just give us a sense of what it is, what it's like to live there, what it's like to be one of the, the kind of big movers and shakers there. And just kind of what

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people, what sort of people you're kind of interacting with every day and how different are they to people like me and Rory? Well, I think any folks who try to accomplish something large have some differences in these centricities. So I certainly wouldn't think of you and Rory as normal. I can assure you, I don't know about Rory, but I take that as a compliment.

Yes, it was meant as a compliment. And the same thing here, which is, you know, it's, it's not surprising to be in a very broad range of conversation that's not just, of course, what are the new technology is going on with AI, what's going on in quantum computing, what's going on with synthetic biology and all the rest of that stuff as kind of ways of these, that these things work. But also from, you know, okay, so what is the way that these technologies are going to change society or evolve who it is to be human? Sometimes fanciful conversations, like, are we living in a simulation? You know, kind of all these things. And part of the thing that makes an entrepreneurial ecosystem like Silicon Valley work is it's intensely immigration focused. You know, the vast majority of the players who make huge things here, certainly weren't born here, but almost all of them have moved here either from other places in the US or other places in the world. And that gives you a broader, you know, kind of discussion values, intellectual landscape, although there is a shared religion on the capabilities of technology to make a huge difference in the world, in society, in industry. I guess one of the things that listeners will be fascinated in, particularly in Europe, is the question of what it takes to create this kind of ecosystem. What would it take for Paris to become a Silicon Valley or London to become a Silicon Valley? Is it even possible to imagine, could we get there partially?

What's holding us back? What could we learn if we wanted to try to replicate even a small way that's success at Silicon Valley? Well, it's one of the things that I invest a bunch of my time in. You know, I've done this, Silicon Valley comes to the UK with Sherry Kutu. I've invested in entrepreneur first, you know, kind of in London and other places, you know, I make efforts in Paris and other places, you know, on the continent. And I do think it's totally doable.

You do have to have a kind of a immigration oriented culture that brings people in who are willing to, because, you know, the really hard charging entrepreneurs are willing to move to wherever they can be most successful. And they're not looking for work life balance, they're working for how do you make something really work. You have to have a kind of a bit more of a culture of ask for forgiveness versus ask for permission, so that you can be bold and try things and you can correct them afterwards, but that sort of thing. And you have to be willing to allow, you know, kind of, well, you don't know what the outcome is when you start it. And you have to like turn over some cards or go down the path some and see and then correct. And if it's like bad for society, something else, then correct it, but allow some experimentation for doing it. And you need to have that in a network ecosystem, where people are learning intensely from each other. And that's the kind of thing you need to set up.

Rory said in his introduction, we described you as a public intellectual, it's a phrase that he's very, very fond of. What do you, I mean, I'm sure if you were interviewing him for your podcast, that's how he would like to be introduced as well. But what's your definition of a public intellectual? Do you feel that that's what you are as well as an entrepreneur? And because you mentioned Oxford in the UK. I'd just be interested in your take on the difference between having been educated at Stanford and then spending some time at Oxford as well. And what that told you about the difference between California slash the States and Britain? Well, there's long answers

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to each of those. I would think of Rory as a public intellectual. So I would give him that. And that's a little bit of how Rory and I met because I'm interested in that. And I would say I personally aspire to that. I tried to contribute in that way. When I was at Oxford, that was what I thought I would grow up to be when I grew up. And I, you know, later realized you never want to grow up. But the question is, is, you know, kind of other public intellectuals, kind of engaging in discourse with the broader society, sometimes with other public intellectuals, but kind of be broader than that about who we are as individuals, society and who we should be. And why is that?

You know, where does social patterns and where does government and where does culture and where does technology and where all these things come in and how you blend those to this is the path we're on as human beings, the path we're on as societies, the path we're on as humanity. These are the choices we make. This is how we should walk that path. This is how we should do things. And I

think that's what being a public intellectual is. And then for the last part in terms of Oxford, there was a bunch of things that were really useful. One, a different educational pedagogy, which had me kind of learn differently. So, you know, for example, in, in Stanford, it was always, well, here's where you are, and here's how you can do a little better. And Oxford was, here's the standard. And here's why you're so far below it as a, as a, as a, as a, as a kind of a default engagement pattern. What does that say about two national psyches, do you think? That's a very interesting observation. Well, I think, you know, it's kind of a little bit of the, the classic British, well, I can't complain. Or, you know, that sort of thing. And it was, by the way, very interesting culturally. And I was glad to have both. I didn't think the Oxford thing was better. I thought it was different and powerful. But, but, but having first gone to Stanford, then Oxford, I think really helped shape my thinking in all fronts as, as a public intellectual, as a philosopher, as a, as a thinker generally. Do Roy, just before you come in, just to ask you that, you've experienced both Oxford and also Yale. So is Reid right about the kind of, what he seems to me to be saying is that Britain is kind of, you know, mind your place where America is, go where you can. Well, I think there's a lot of that. I also think that these universities are changing a lot. I mean, when you were at Cambridge or when I, when I was at Oxford or when Reid was

at Oxford, these places were much more aggressive. And I think that they're probably now British universities are becoming more enabling. We're becoming more like American universities. But you're definitely right. I mean, in teaching at Yale or teaching at Harvard, you very much felt the ethos was about supporting people, encouraging people. So Reid, what was, what would be your complaints about Britain? What would you say? I mean, you're obviously, you're being very polite and charming, but if you were being cheeky about Britain, what would you say you noticed at Oxford,

which, which was less appealing? Why are you not living here? Why are you not living in London? Too many privately educated people. Yeah, too many publicly educated people. Just, just for the, the fun, you know, hip check. I fundamentally have discovered myself to be transatlantic. The things that I love about Britain and the Europe that I would wish the US to evolve more and the things that, that I wish Britain in the, and Europe would evolve more towards the US side.

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And so to answer your question, it's kind of the question is the belief that individuals can, can make entirely of themselves. So less hierarchy, even though it is not as bad as, you know, say France, right? Or other places, there is still kind of a hierarchy class system. Another one is the, while the, the British are spectacular users of language, I would always find myself having to try to decipher, especially English versus British, you know, the, oh, that's a nice suit, which means that suit sucks, you know, as kind of, you know, the kind of the pattern of this, this kind of language. And then also, you know, and kind of a parallel is wondering if it was island cultures with Japan was kind of this notion of, of, of trying to avoid shame and not thinking, look, be bold and ventures them and possibly encounter something that could be embarrassing, right? And embarrassment is fine. You know, if you're learning and you're engaging authentically with other human beings, and that's probably the most American thing I've said on this podcast so far.

When did you decide that actually you didn't really want to go down, they can have an academic route, but you saw yourself as a, as an entrepreneur? And when did you light upon what we broadly call the tech world as the space that you'd end up in?

Well, this is one of the great gifts of having gone to Stanford was because I hadn't really thought about it. I'm much more of a humanist than a technologist. I hadn't really thought about the technology side, except that I'd seen a whole bunch of people with Silicon Valley and Stanford kind of think about how you could change the world with it. And then when I went to Oxford

thinking I was going to be a public intellectual, I had the deep honor and privilege of spending some time with Bernard Williams there. And, you know, it's kind of classic, you know, public intellectuals and kind of discussion, truth in society and classics and all the rest of this.

And I basically kind of went, wait, the academic path, especially, you know, in humanities, especially in philosophy is going to be an intense amount of scholarly work of a very narrow frame. And what I care about is kind of where we're going as a society and it doesn't say that there isn't some stuff that comes out of that. But that is not my path. And that is not a path that I think really hit scale. I think it tends to get out in the eddies of, of little, you know, kind of, and I'll be a little harsher scholastic debates on things and wasn't for me. And I said, what should I do? And I was like, well, actually, in fact, this software entrepreneurship, if you think about, you know, kind of who we are as individuals in a society, who we should be, this software entrepreneurship can create the medium by which we connect with each other, by which we evolve. And I want to go work in that software medium. And I hadn't thought about being an entrepreneur, I was just like, that could evolve our worldviews, our communication, our sense of ourselves, our sense of our place in the world, through a different medium.

And did you always want to be wealthy? Was making money a big part of what you set out to do?

Well, initially, what I wanted was I wanted to be free of needing a salary. And I got that as a strategy very early. So that, that is wealthy. If you, if you don't need a salary, you have a fair amount of money, but it was just that as a goal, it wasn't money for its own sake, it was for enabling me. And then after PayPal, where I got into that objective, I then realized that having more money to spend and doing projects was going to be really useful. And I had this lucky position that I knew how to do investing in entrepreneurship to make a huge amount of money in order to do that. And so then I, I followed that path to, to where I currently am.

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Let's take us back a little bit to PayPal. So I think the first thing that's striking is that you came into Silicon Valley, I guess in the sort of 94, which didn't feel like the sort of big, sexy time. Steve Jobs had sort of stepped back. It was before the really crazy booms. And obviously, it was before the second sort of great social media booms. And presumably you were, that's, that's actually part of the trick, isn't it? That, that a lot of you got in there slightly before everybody else had, had realized it was trendy. Tell us a little bit about PayPal and the characters at PayPal. And is that book right that PayPal is quite a good way of understanding the evolution of Silicon Valley? And it's very generous to you. I noticed that book.

Do you feel it's too generous to you or the bits of you that it's missing in its descriptions?

Well, there's, there is your Englishness to my Americanism. Is it too generous to you?

And I hope not. But we'll see. That's, that's for other people to judge. Let's see. So, you know, one, I do think that the PayPal book is very good. It is a lens into the kind of modern network version of Silicon Valley.

For listeners, really sorry, just to, just to fill people in. So essentially, the story is a story of something that feels as though it's going to collapse at any moment. I mean, it feels as though you're all working unbelievable hours. So, you know, engineers are calling their families to say they're not going to be back that night. You're going through three CEOs in two years. These massive credit card companies, in other words, Visa or Mastercard is, is basically out to kill you. You've got huge legislative challenges. I mean, it's a story where it almost feels as though every couple of months, any objective viewer would be like, well, Reed, you've done a good job, but it's time to give it in because this is obviously going to prove impossible.

And that must have developed for you and Elon Musk and Peter Thiel and all these other people who went through that. An extraordinary sort of belief in your own capacities because the odds seem to be stacked so hard against you. Yeah, I think that I think the question says it well, which is you can be facing what seems like, you know, you're in a plane and you're accelerating towards the ground and you can pull it out. And so that belief that you can do very big things. And I think, you know, you mentioned Elon, you mentioned Peter. I also think that, you know, Max Levchin,

who was a co-founder of PayPal, also deserves a mention here. And I think that that ability to say, yes, we can go build very big things, are comedian levers that can change the world.

And we can do so even when multiple times, it seems like we're all going to be in one big mushroom cloud, that's just going to be complete failure.

Can you give us a sense of the relationship between you and some of these other names that will be well known to a lot of our listeners and also how the politics of this works? I mean, you know, Roy and I both from kind of political backgrounds. Because if I think of what I know of you, I see somebody who strikes me as being on the progressive side of politics.

We'll talk later about your kind of massive political donations that you made to the Biden campaign, for example. I look at Peter Thiel and correct me if I'm wrong, I see somebody who to me is very much on what I would define as the right of politics and has a view of politics and politicians that is probably, you know, can we just get these people out of the way. And then I look at Elon Musk and particularly at the moment with what seems to me to be a pretty narcissistic approach to the world and the way that he expresses himself and so forth. So listen, you actually know these people. So tell us a bit about them, about your relationship with them and about where

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you think they are on the political spectrum. Well, you know, your chart is reasonably good. I've obviously have enormous respect for both Peter and Elon and have learned a ton from them in various ways. Peter and I met at Stanford because he had been hearing about this person who is, you know, in his language, a socialist, you know, kind of, you know, the kind of a far left person. And I'd been hearing about this person who my friends are telling me was right wing of Attila the Hun. And so when we bumped into each other in a philosophy class, like I've heard of you, we need to talk, right. And immediately started arguing. And part of the basis of our friendship at Stanford was that exploration of learning that there was an intense amount of intelligence and kind of structured position to what each of us thought was the other person was a crazy position. So, you know, in the classic argument form of reductio ad absurdum, we both thought, ah, you have to change your view now because I've gotten you to the absurd conclusion. Well, yes, that's what I believe. And so that was that. And then Elon, you know, Elon is, you know, obviously one of the most amazing entrepreneurs of our time. SpaceX, Tesla, you know, huge contributions to humanity through, you know, sheer force of will and belief that the limits of what's capable is only what's physically possible. But as such, he has kind of a, you know, I am the builder to save humanity. And I think part of the politics things, he just thinks that other people in their consideration should get out of his way in terms of what he's in terms of what he's doing. And he does care deeply about humanity, but he thinks, you know, that he's on a heroic quest and that, you know, should be given the space to do that.

Is there a bit of a messiah complex going on?

100%. One of the things that I think in these things, like if you will go to the AI stuff, one of the things I ask everybody that I talk to in AI is if you don't build, say, AGI, artificial Joe intelligence, a kind of a machine that's as intelligent as, you know, as we are, although people may think the three of us aren't that smart, are kind of like that creation. If you don't create it, who else would you want to create it? And if you don't have an answer to that, you have a messiah complex.

Wow. So, and Pete, so it sounds to me like Peter Thiel is the one for whom you have perhaps more enduring respect in terms of values. Is that right?

Well, I would say that I have enduring respect for both of them as people who I've learned a great deal from and accomplished a bunch of stuff in the world. You know, Peter and I have had some

more difficult waters around the Trump side because, you know, he has obviously been a fairly strong supporter of Trump. And even though he kind of claims that he is, or at least there's indirect claims that he is kind of sitting this out now, I don't know how true any of that is. I hope it's true. That would be awesome. But the notion that he thinks of Trump as a more moral candidate than many of the other people is, you know, kind of very difficult for me to comprehend. Reid, one of the things that you sometimes say over the years provocatively is more important than almost any other philanthropic contribution you can make is just making sure Donald Trump doesn't take over in the White House. Do you want to explain to us why you feel that so powerfully, when you came to feel that, when you realized this, how this is played out, and why you feel this is so existential?

So I knew this even back to, you know, kind of 2016, 2017, because, you know, Donald Trump is a person who has lived his life in public. There isn't actually, in fact, a real surprise here. I

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mean, here's a person who never pays his bills to the people he engages in contracts unless he has to.

So, you know, all the contractors, you know, know that their last bill will never be paid.

You know, here's a person who postures himself as great, even though he only, maybe he cares about Ivanka too, but like basically only cares about himself, which makes him kind of an odd figure of a leader of a populist grievance movement, because it's kind of like, do you guys understand this person?

And also doesn't think law applies to him and is, you know, I believe deeply corrupt in a variety of ways. And it's part of, you know, the reason why I've kind of helped with a couple of the lawsuits, including the Eugene Carroll one and others. And, you know, that kind of like he doesn't care about anything other than himself is terrible for leading society. He says, all I feel your grievance and I will go clear out those, the drain the swamp of the White House. And it's like, actually, in fact, I'm going to go make it much more swampy. And I'm going to go do this entirely for myself and don't care about you at all. You know, like, for example, if he were to become the Republican candidate and win, you know, he'll pull out of the Ukraine war the next day. He'll threaten to pull out of NATO. You know, it doesn't care about, you know, the children who are dying and suffering, plus all the other people in the Ukraine as part of doing this, you know, is a fan of dictators around the world. Like he's his comment when meeting Kim Jong-un is, I wish everyone had to stand up and salute me that way. Like, okay. Maybe you should go move to Korea

and be there. But what does he say that? So you talk about something like Peter Taylor, you know, very, very successful entrepreneur, founded PayPal, associated with lots of the big successes in your world. And yet as you say, regardless of what he might think now, knowing all that stuff, he not only supported it in terms of putting his vote for Trump, you know, he supported him hugely financially as well in a system that as you know, as well as anybody, because you're a massive contributor to political campaigns on the Democrat side. I'm not sure I could sit down and have a civil conversation with him knowing that he played such a prominent role in that. Look, I think it's, as I said, it was challenging and has been very challenging for, you know, kind of Peter's in my interactions, because, you know, Peter's like, well, we've got to stop talking about Trump because it's interfering with how we interact. And I was like, look, I can't talk to you about anything but Trump until I stop you supporting.

Well, until at least I understand this. I mean, if I were to imagine, this is not what Peter said to me, but if I were to imagine a position like Peter's that I would try to argue if I was in his shoes and say, look, the American society is so sclerotic that we need a wrecking ball to kind of reset it. And it's unfortunate that wrecking ball has all of the grossness of Donald Trump in terms of corruption and narcissism and lack of care in regard for literally almost everybody else in terms of what, in terms of what's happening and no theory of governance. I have a great healthcare plan. I'm just never going to tell you ever, right, as to what it is, you know, and you say, okay, but that's a wrecking ball we need. I disagree with that, but at least I can argue with it. But the other, but everything else, I don't know what the, I just don't know what the the coherent moral and, and ethical justification is for supporting somebody who is erosive to democracy and the rule of law. And do you find, I mean, you've just been in Italy, where I think you saw Georgia Maloney, you know a lot of the European politicians.

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And Alistair and I talk about this a lot. I mean, we're in a very, very disturbing moment in European history where the far right parties are now up at 20, 25% in Germany.

They're doing very well in the Nordic countries, marrying Le Pen as in pole position, potentially to take over as an ex-president of France. We're talking to you in the middle of a conservative conference where the British Conservative Party has gone full Trumpian.

I mean, the Home Secretary, Swelle Braverman is now talking about millions of immigrants swarming into the country and they're getting into the classic cultural wars around pretty much everything you can imagine. What on earth is going on? I mean, what's your sense of what's happening? And do you, do you see, how do you see Boris Johnson compared to Trump? How do you view all this stuff from across the, across the Atlantic?

Well, you know, I thought there was a bunch of things where Boris was a version of Trump, you know, pro-roging parliament, you know, kind of a similar, like the rules don't apply to me, COVID lockdown for everyone else. And I'm going to have a party in the backyard, you know, like, you know, all that kind of stuff struck me as, at least birds of a feather. Obviously, living with the Trump stuff, either Trump was much worse. But, you know, when I talked to various British friends, no, no, Boris is just as bad. And it's like, well, okay, you know, I could believe it if I was, you know, more local and paying attention. That wasn't dispute. And I do think that we are definitely in a crisis time for the world, a crisis time for democracy. And now people frequently will then go, it's the worst ever. And you're like, well, I take the US as a constant. Like, we're not in the Civil War. There are definitely worse periods in, in kind of US history. Maybe we'll get there. It's definitely a down cycle. We hope we don't. That would be a really, like just massively terrible thing. And it's part of the reason why, for example, being so urgent on the rule of law, so urgent on democracy, so urgent on the stuff is really important. And that applies in the Europe context too. Because, you know, part of the, obviously the echoes that thoughtful people worry about is they worry about like, you know, the 30s. And they say, well, are we on another path of the 30s? Does it lead to a similarly bad thing? How do we make a better society without resorting to fascism as an angle for doing this? And, you know, I'm hopeful that we won't get anywhere close to any of the, you know, the bloody lines. But, but I think it requires work to do so. And I think everybody has to say, how do I help contribute to making society better? There's a little bit of public intellectual comment because I think we are in troubled times. Do you think it's possible to make the case that without social media, and I think artificial intelligence, its impact upon democratic politics could be even more extreme and more difficult, that without that, Trump would never have been elected,

Brexit would never have happened. Some of these right-wing populist movements would never have got the traction that they've managed to get. You know, I definitely think that because the concept of social media is so broadly libertarian, that it allows itself to be, or at least the leaders of Twitter and, and to a lesser extent, Facebook, kind of allow that, that it can be hacked by crazy populist groups, it can be hacked by Russians, it can be hacked by, and I think that has a negative, a serious negative contributor. I don't think it's inherently bad. I think it's kind of a question of just as we figure out what is the balance of, like, you know, in the US, this kind of freedom of speech stuff, what is the balance from between the thing I can say the moon

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is made out of green cheese, and I think aliens and Martians are running the White House, and I'm allowed to do that, but I don't have the amplification of it. I don't have the QAnon or the Pizza Gate or other kinds of things. And, and sorting through that is I think one of the things that's very important. And broadly, I think it can be shaped in a way that it's actually much more of a positive contributor than negative, but that's not undercutting what the negative contributions have been. But by the way, you know, people tend to want to hang that on just the social

media. And like, when I look at this, I go, well, which of these two has a more negative impact? Fox News or, you know, kind of Twitter. And I tend to think, like, what gets amplified through Twitter is all of the essentially pure garbage on Fox News. And you can tell because, like, the Dominion lawsuit kind of tells us about the Dominion, remind us about the Dominion lawsuit because some listeners won't be familiar. So Dominion is an electronic voting system. One of the things that, that to try to support the fraudulent criminal and narcissistic claim by Donald Trump that this 2020 election was stolen was making a whole bunch of like, and this, this electronic voting system by Dominion systems was, was corrupt. And so they sued them and sued them

because here's a place where it's not political thing, it's an economic thing, and it's a basis on fact. And Fox had to pay a lot of money because it was all rampant lies that they knew were rampant lies, but also then revealed the text between these people like Tucker Carlson and Sean Hannity saying, yeah, the people who believe us on this stolen stuff are totally bonkers, but we have to say it because that's what they want to hear, you know, and you have it as a part of a public record. And it's like, understand that these people are lying to you because they think it's the way that they get in front of you as, as exciting you as the mob. But they're still watching. But they're still watching.

Why are they still watching? Why do people want to be lied to?

Well, because, you know, kind of a classic human thing is they want to be validated in their emotional belief that the way the world is working that they don't like is because there's these evil liberals who are stealing it from them and corrupting their children and being told that versus being told anything else helps them, you know, kind of validate their point of view. And so that's part of, part of what goes on here.

Well, thank you. And let's just take a quick break.

One of the things I was talking to Yvonne Harari about last week is he's very interested in the way in which AI could make these kind of QAnon conspiracies in a much more powerful and convincing

way just to remind us as the QAnon conspiracies are obviously these very, very powerful amongst certain factions of far-right voters which make allegations about child sex rings in the Clinton White House. And goodness knows what else. I mean, this is sort of pseudo religious conspiracy fantasies. Do you feel that that is something that we really need to concentrate on before the next election? And the reason I feel this is that when I was running, to be mayor of London, I had a couple of companies come and pitch me who said that they were, you know, former Israeli intelligence and special forces people and they offered to win elections for me using a whole series of different social media tools and said they'd done it in 52 countries and all this kind of stuff. And I imagine those same people will now

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be pitching their services on the basis of their ability to use AI. Could you talk to us a little bit about AI in the next election? So it's definitely a concern because it is an amazing human amplifier, you know, part of the book impromptu that you know that I wrote about how AI is amplification intelligence, which in certainly for listeners read actually wrote with chat GPT for it's a great book impromptu. And it's definitely worth reading for interest in AI, but it's it's a book written that she has a dialogue between him and AI. First book on AI co written with AI is a is the kind of a slogan tagline is chat GPT for a public intellectual. Certainly can be like go go interact with it. You can you can have public intellectual conversations with it. It doesn't really have as much of a point of view, which you generally expect a public like you can say broadly argue for this argue against this, but it's clever. But it is it can be very clever. I highly recommend it. I think I think I threw Rory into the deep end on it and he's now like, Oh, this is more interesting than I thought it was. He's morally obsessed, I'd say. Yeah. And and so there is a real issue there. Now, but that issue obscures the thing that, you know, the Q and on theory happened just fine with a whole bunch of human beings doing it. You know, you got the Russians and Putin hiring Nigerians to write a whole bunch of stuff and spread it within social media, not just within the US, but within Europe, as kind of ways of doing this. And so it's it's not necessarily totally new. And presumably read to push push a little bit further. There could be a scale of amplification where the change in quantity is almost the change in quality. I mean, if the application becomes unbelievably powerful, sophisticated, and the Q and on conspiracy or the new conspiracy can almost be micro adjusted to every different listener and and evolve very, very quickly, you can imagine something having a very, very powerful cultural emotional effect before an election. Yeah. And that's where exactly where I was going. So you kind of elaborated the point that I was that was heading along. And I think there's there's ways to use AI to be on the other side of it. But, you know, it's one of the reasons why when the companies got together at the White House, one of the things they said, we will all kind of voluntarily commit to doing is essentially watermarking AI content to try to prevent, you know, some of this flood of misinformation. Now, the problem, of course, is there's open source models. And these open source models are provided by a variety of companies in the US, UK and France. And those open source models can produce a whole bunch of this content in volume without watermark. So it's, it's, it's a legitimate attempt to be positive by, you know, Microsoft, Google, Inflection, Anthropa and so forth. But it's, you know, we're going to have to go much further to try to, to allay the problems that will be front and center in 2024. Just back on the political front, we have, as you may know, we have limits on spending on our political campaigns. I just wondered, first of all, have you any idea how much money you have actually made in political donations during your life? And secondly, whether you think on balance, American politics would be better if it were possible to have the kind of spending limits that we have. So yes, I am because I'm a business person. I keep accurate ledgers. I don't report the number because it's a very large number. And I do think that, that campaign financing limits are, are actually a very good thing. And the primary reason, of course, I do this is because you say, well, if there's going to be a whole bunch of money trying to turn the US into a theocracy or a divided kind of cultural war kind of place, I will try to put in some money to kind of, to shift away from that, you know, kind of as a, as a way of doing it. And it's part of what I think

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is my moral responsibility as a child of the country who's been fortunate enough to make a bunch of money. So to try to contribute positively.

Does it make it very, very difficult when we talk about billion dollar elections, that's kind of mind blowing for a British mindset. And yeah, it would seem to me that whether it's Trump against Biden, Trump against Hillary, when Obama first won without that sort of level of funding, do you think it's literally impossible to win an election now without those sorts of sums of money flowing in? On the big national elections, fundamentally, it's almost impossible without because it's the question of, you know, how do you pay for all this stuff like advertising? And how do you, you know, even pay for even if you have a total grassroots movement, how do you support and coordinate all of the grassroots? How do you use an understanding of where the electorate is to know which doors to knock on and all the rest, all of which is kind of an economic expense here.

So, Reed, you've set up one of the biggest AI companies in the world with Mustafa Suleiman, who we interviewed a few weeks ago. And he often at the moment sounds more on the pessimistic robot succumbing end of the AI debate. And you seem to be more on the optimistic side.

I guess that's a very coarse characterization and you'd be more nuanced in that. But give us the optimistic case. Give us reasons not to see AI purely in sort of negative, fearful terms. So, the thing is, human beings always, when they encounter something broadly new in technology, always think that it's going to be there. When the printing press was created, it was going to be a corruption of human cognitive capabilities because you no longer need to remember

and a spreader of misinformation. And so, you know, the fact that we author books and use a printing press show that there is a certain negative of that. AI is the exact same and we can go through everything. We can go through phonographs, electricity, steam engine, a bunch of other things, those ways of doing it. And all of these technologies, I think we can shape them to be much, much better. And part of the reason, of course, I wrote in Promptu and kind of, you know, twisted your arm to read it, was to essentially, you know, kind of say, look, here is how it could be really amazing as human amplification. You know, we can have a tutor on every smartphone that works from anything from a two-year-old to an 80-year-old on every subject that's infinitely patient to help you in anything in your life. Obviously, part of what Mustafa and I are trying to do with Pi, the personal intelligence. You could have a medical assistant available on every smartphone for everyone who has access to a smartphone, anyone in the world. Think about the alleviation of human suffering that you can do when you do that

because of the 8 billion people in the world, substantially less than a billion have, you know, real access to doctors. And so, and by the way, even when you have access to a doctor, you know, say you had a medical assistant, you have access to doctors, yes, okay, I'm not a doctor, you should see your doctor, but let's talk about it a little bit and say, oh, here's what you should tell your doctor when you're seeing them, right? You know, as a help and as an amplifier. And, you know, like, for example, in Britain, you have rationing in the NHS. Well, think about if you could pre-do your visit each time before you go in to see a doctor with a medical assistant and be much more efficient than the doctors can actually help a bunch more people in good ways. That's all of the things that are a line of sight today for this technology.

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And that's the reason why they go use it and understand how you can use it to be helpful to your humanity, to the society at large. And I am unreservedly optimistic across all of the democracy, jobs, quality of life, quality of work. I think all of this stuff is doable in a very positive way. Okay. And if you woke up and you weren't, didn't have your usual sort of positive read, help, and outlook on life, and you were a bit more Mustafa in your thinking, what might you see as the potential downsides? And what, I guess what I meant, what should we maybe worry about a little bit, even if the big picture can be positive? Well, part of my criticism of the critics, because most of the people who say, oh, you know, like AI, the robots are coming for us, you know, science fiction, other kinds of stuff, is that the real issue is that AI is a human amplifier. And so a human amplifier in bad human hands, whether it's terrorists, criminals, rogue states, et cetera. And you get distracted by, and the robots will be a new level of sentience that will remake the world. And we need to be obsessed by that. And it's like, well, I'm actually much more obsessed by AI in the hands of Putin, AI in the hands of Kim Jong-un, AI in the hands of, you know, a terrorist, a criminal, and how do we navigate that? And that's our first order. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't pay any attention whatsoever to, like, what's happening as potential science fiction. And I pay attention to, could these machines be self-improving, and so forth. And by the way, Mustafa, and my positions are not so far apart, other than he thinks that there will be big changes in society coming, and we need to pay attention to them on a society basis. He's also actually a technological optimist relative to, you know, he's building pie, and he knows what he can make for humanity. And so he's actually more in the, we can really steer to very positive things. He's just more highlighting, and by the way, we really need to make sure we avoid that landmine.

We're primarily a politics podcast. And I guess the big question in this is regulation. What do you think smart politicians should be doing and thinking about AI? What should they be regulating and when? So I don't know of any instances where you take a forming technology but is yet unformed and you have predicted it and regulated it in a good way that isn't just really slowing down innovation. So I tend to think that a lot of the regulation stuff is to say, pay attention and then move rapidly to change the things that are potentially bad and focus on the really bad things, not the things that can be easily fixed in one, two, or three years. Like we say, well, you know, AI is hallucinating. You know, like, well, we're fixing that every month in terms of bad outcomes. And it's just, by the way, Google search hallucinates too. You're just getting it down to a certain kind of area. And so that's, I think, one thing. And then the really extreme cases like the use of terrorism, the use in criminality, like how can we restrict that in various ways? How do we be careful about the spread of AI within global conflict to bad state actors? You know, those kinds of things, I think, are the right things for government folks to focus on and the things to do. And then you obviously iterate and you pay attention to, well, could this create a racial bias that could be a really problem? Yes, let's pay attention to that and let's fix it because we can fix it. But if you look at the way the social media has developed, is it not the case that by the time the politicians kind of caught up with the impact that it was having, or that they thought it might have in relation, say, to child abuse, some of the, you know, terrorism that you mentioned, some of the political implications that we've talked about, that it was too late? And is there not a danger of that with artificial intelligence?

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There's certainly a risk of it and a danger of it. And by the way, there will certainly be some bad things that happen that we wish we could have forestalled in advance. But this is part of, like, you know, back to this kind of how is technology created and how do you learn is you create it, you deploy it, you learn from it, you iterate. The hope, let me call it the Brussels hope, that you can dictate kind of the pattern of innovation and do intense risk studies and that's actually not the way that these things work. And it's part of the reason why when you look at it, you say, well, it's the internet, it's cloud, it's mobile, all of that's created in the US where Europe hasn't done anything. AI could be another one of those, or AI could be something that you potentially participate in. I'd love you to give a sense of what you feel you're proud as the achievement in your life so far has been. What are the things that you look back on and you think that was genuinely worthwhile? Well, you know, this may be the most American thing now that I said on the podcast, which is my family. No, no, I hope that it's still in front of me. We didn't even think of that. The best is yet to come. Yes. So, you know, maybe it's inflection in pie, maybe it's other things. You know, so far, I'd say, you know, obviously, LinkedIn has hundreds of millions of people. I think the public number is something north of 850 million people trying to create economic opportunity. It's most focused on every individual and as kind of a use of technology for doing that and for how, for example, social networks can elevate people as individuals and as groups and as companies and societies and kind of further make economic attention. That's obviously one, you know, kind of helping a number of entrepreneurs, you know, create stuff, whether it's Airbnb, you know, other kinds of projects for, you know, also helping elevate humanity. But like I said, the most American thing, I hope the best is still to come. Well, maybe my final question then is this, perhaps the best that is yet to come is that you play a central role in stopping Donald Trump become president again. But I want to ask you a question that Rory and I asked a British business audience when we saw them recently. We asked them this question, who do you think will be the president of America in 2025? A. Joe Biden be Donald Trump or see somebody else? So what's your answer to that? Joe Biden, who I think is a very decent centrist and exactly where we'd want to be. And, you know, I don't think it's a foregone conclusion. I think it's going to be a difficult race because making that case to the American people and having people hear it, I think is very important. But the, that we care about decency and we care about kind of like helping everyday people move forward. I think that's, that's the Biden message. Love it.

Now, Reed, you've been very generous with your time, but I wanted to get a couple of questions and tell us a little bit about how you became interested in friendship and what your fundamental theory of friendship is. And then two days later, they finished this conversation.

And basically, you know, perhaps like many folks, you know, I kind of go through high school and I kind of, you know, was like, wow, this is a really strange thing. And I don't find many people that I really connect with and the world is this kind of chaotic, strange place. And I got to Stanford and I started building some amazing, deep friendships where suddenly I felt more like on path to the person that I could be, that I wanted to be, that I should be. And, you know, like, for example, the discovery on the public intellectual stuff was through discussions with friends, through discussions about like, you know, who are we and who should we be? And, and how do we challenge each other? And how do we grow to being the best possible versions

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of ourselves? Oh, my God, this friendship thing, this is the really important thing in the meaning of life that is literally not talked about nearly enough. Like if you go into a bookstore, there's just oodles of books on like relationships and, you know, how to, you know, like the, and very few on friendships is one kind of thing. And it's everything from philosophical depth. So like, when you look at the history of it, you go, well, there's this little treatise from Cicero, there's this essay from Montaigne, there's this Nikomiki and ethics thing, but there's very, very little. And yet it is so critical. And like from the historical and philosophical and deeply intellectual to the, what does it mean? Like, for example, there's a whole bunch of questions you can ask about friendship. What are the duties of friendship? What are the obligations? Where, where should friendship be challenging? When should friendships end? You know, all of these things, most people go, huh, hadn't really thought about that. And so that was the, if you asked me when I was an undergraduate was the first book I was going to write was going to be on friendship. I still hope to do so. As you know, Rory, and I keep getting distracted by doing things like, oh gosh, you know, if Trump gets elected, we're going to move to massive world disorder that's going to cause suffering all over the world, including in the US. Let's try to avoid that. How many close friends have you got then? I don't count. I do have a number that I don't think there's a rule that one can only have three or one can only have five. But it's that level of not, is that kind of area close, close, close, close friends? You know, probably, although it's probably more like 10 or 15. And the thing about it is, like again, a little bit the subtle corruption is a friendship is you think, well, just one, and you're, you're hung up on the number of versus when you're interacting with your friends, whether it's a friend that you maybe have just made on a plane or has wandered up to you in a conference and started talking to you as a, as a gesture in Rory's direction. We, we, we mess at a conference. Yes. And to be as genuine and present on that path as possible. And that's the focus point, not the, well, I already have enough close friends. I have three, you know, it's, it's the, how do you take all of your interactions and be as real and present on that path as possible? I don't think there's any magic numbers. And can I just come in on this? Because Alistair, you, I think, do have a sort of genius for friendships. And I noticed that when I see Dave Miliband pop around a little present around the door, I see the loyalty that you showed to the team that you worked with. Give us a little bit of a sense of friendship in your life. You don't talk much about it, but I'm right inside that you do have actually quite deep loyal friendships. Yeah, but I don't think I have that many. I think we often say to people, I often say to you, Rory, we talk about somebody to get on the podcast. I say, oh, yeah, he's a really good friend of mine. But then if I were to say, if one of my kids was in real difficulty, or if I would, if I had something was happening to me health wise, how many people would I really, really, really feel that I needed to tell, to me, that's a true friend. And I would like them to think that I was the same version for them. I've had quite a few friends who've died, some very close friends who've died. But I think friendship, I wouldn't ever think that somebody I met on a plane was a friend until I got to know them for several years thereafter. I'm a bit of a slow burner on the friendship front, not that you and I aren't going to be really good friends read forever. I mean, you know, this has been a great first, been a great first meeting. Where I completely agree with you is I don't think we, we think about it and value it nearly as much as we should.

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So in the first couple of months that I was in Oxford, as I'll put England versus Britain on this, I was talking about how much more approachable Americans were than English. And I was talking to a person who was like, oh, no, of course, approachable. I said, okay. So how long do you have to be seeing someone in the supermarket that you're going to, that you see them in the same supermarket before you introduce yourself and talk to them? And the answer then was three years. And I was like, okay, in the US, it's like second or third time.

No, the other thing is, I disagree with that. I would say that in Britain, there comes a point where you've seen them so often, you feel it's no longer possible to ask them their name.

Fair enough. And I actually think that part of the thing that, that is the, the mysterious delight around friendship is it's a state of becoming. That's a path that you're walking with someone. And that's part of the reason why it's not a category mistake and mistake that you go, say you sat next to somebody on a plane flight, and you had just this amazing conversation. You talked about, you know, your family and your friends and what you're doing.

Maybe you revealed some points of vulnerability in each other and you talked about it and you go, well, are we friends now or not? It's like, well, we're on, we've started the path, right? Obviously, the depth of trust of who you might leave your children to if you are passing, you know, that kind of stuff, that's still to be, to come, but you're on the friendship path. And I think that's the, the thing that is so often one of the mistakes that people think about this is they don't think about it as, look, it's a dynamic path and there's different values. Like some people have told me, there is, you know, kind of like, well, your friend is the person who you can call at 3am and the airport will come pick you up. It's like, well, that's one kind of friendship. And it's a valuable thing. And there's these kind of multiple dimensions on friendship that are deeply valuable. And that's one, but it's kind of like, what are the things that are valuable to who you are and who you are in the process, the path of becoming. And those are to some degree, you're closer friends. I think one of the things, Reid, that I noticed with you is that you are very good at a combination of patience and nudging. So the example that I had with him recently is that he was giving me advice on transitioning out of a job. And Reid spent a lot of time talking on the phone, talking me through it, talking through the options. And I failed to update him. And he sent me a very sweet, not a kind of chippy hurt message saying, what's going on? Where did you get with this conversation? Could you please update me? And I thought that was a really lovely thing because I think there are two things that people could have done there. They could have been really offended, understandably, where does that guy spend all this time? Giving this guy a surprise and he's gone completely silent on me and not spoken to me at all. Or they could have been super polite about it. But I thought that was nice. Do you think friendship benefits from nudging occasionally?

Yes. And actually, one of the things you have to decide, like, for example, my fundamental favorite friendship is two people decide to try to help each other be the best possible versions of themselves. And if you agree with that as a theory, one of the things that needs to be is that you should be thinking, what is the nudge or the thing this person needs to hear that maybe they haven't heard and haven't heard from another source? And how do I help provide that? And that doesn't necessarily mean sitting down and saying, I think you're out of your mind because of topic

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x, right? Or you're doing something categorically wrong because of activity, why? Like, that may not be the friendship way of engaging, right, in this particular thing. But you might say, well, actually, in fact, look, this person needs to think about this, this person needs to think about, like, is this really them? You know, it's kind of like, well, look, when you talk to so and so, you know, you kind of adopted the wrong pattern of doing it, right? And by the way, so I gave by a commencement speech on Vanderbilt last year on friendship in part, and was kind of three examples of how friends had kind of come and pushed me, friend of mine, Kandaren, who had pushed me and understanding, you know, kind of how women talk to women in, you know, kind of my, my generation, and, and what are the things that are different than how men talk to women, men talk to men. And that was enormously illustrative. Another one was kind of showing vulnerability and being able to be open to being helped. And it was not just the, the fact that was very honored to be that person, but also, oh, that's how one should be as friends, I should do that too. You know, those are all kinds of things where you should be intentional about how you're helping people, your friends become the better version of themselves, because that's the delight for them and the delight for you and the delight for the world. I think this is back to your, the difference between you and Mustafa and you, Oxford and Stanford, I think it's an American British thing. Alex Ferguson, you may have heard of, is a very famous football manager. And I always say, this is the best definition of friendship that I ever heard, but you'll, I think you might disagree. He said the, the friend is the person who walks through the door, as everyone else is putting on their coats to leave. Now, I guess you would say that's a very, that's like my definition of friendship is about when you're in crisis is about when things are going wrong, who you're going to turn to. But you're saying friendship is about who's making your life kind of better, more fulfilling, more enjoyable, not least by you helping them at any stage in your life is not about bad stuff. Look, I think it's fundamentally very important to also have, because like, how do you grow to being the person you have, you navigate crisis, you navigate the things that could crush you. So it's very important to have friends who help you with the, Oh God, you know, my world is collapsing. And they come and say, well, we're going to help you survive your world collapsing and get to the next thing. It's a critical thing. I didn't mean to undercut that at all. Friends are the allies who when the artillery starts running down necessarily, the only friends are not the ones who just run and jump in the foxhole. They're the ones you might just go and have a nice time with. Well, but more than a nice time who help you become you. Like if you said the only skill set that I need in friends is what I'm in crisis, they're there for me. And you're like, it's a very, very valuable skill set. If you had to pick one, maybe that's the one you would pick. Right. But it's not the only one, right? That's the point. No, I think we're coming towards the end read, but I wanted to finish with a question that I asked your friend Mustafa, which is what is the one question these interviews don't ask you, but should ask you? Well, there's probably a lot. You know, and we've covered a bunch of really good ones. I love the fact that we've covered friendship. I love the fact that we are kind of talking about human beings as embedded in social and political context. And how do we navigate that?

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Maybe it's per podcast. So like, for example, for this one, it might be with the insanity and craziness of US politics, what could, you know, British politics learn from US culture or something? Because by the way, I certainly think the opposite is true too. There's a whole bunch of stuff that I would wish the US would learn from the British. Give us a bit of a stab at that, because that's a hell of an interesting question. I know how to Alistair to finish this off. I think a little bit of it is usually the easy British reaction to Americans is, oh, look at these simpletons who are kind of nuts and crazy, guns, uneducated, unsophisticated, crazy on religion, you know, there's a whole stack of things that you're are very legitimate criticisms. But then say, well, but what could we learn from the Americans? And that was part of what like I kind of learned, you know, being a student in Oxford, which is actually, in fact, we want to encourage individuals of all places in the British class system and so on to be able to accomplish things such that they could become leaders of society. We're going to allow boldness and risk on that. And we're going to celebrate it as it's happening. And that little bit of disruption in our social thing, which will come with some price and cost, some risks, some mistakes, is something that we could learn from and will help us make a much better, you know, society for ourselves. That would be at least one that I would start with.

Okay. My final question, I guess, is this on friendships, if you go to Peter Till, the major donor to Donald Trump, and said, are we still friends? What does he say?

I don't know. We haven't talked in a few years. I don't know what he would say. I would hope that he would say is, I hope that we can be. Okay. Well, listen, it's been great talking to you. I didn't think we'd end up talking about philosophy or friendship, but I think you should write the book. Maybe that's the great thing that you haven't done yet.

That's one of the ones that's in the possibility set.

Okay. Well, listen, thank you for giving us so much of your time and thanks for talking to us.

Thank you, Reed. Really, really appreciate it. Speak soon.

My pleasure.

All right. Anastasia, what did you think?

I thought he was great. When I was just downstairs chatting to Fiona, I said, I've got to do this podcast. She said, who are you doing it with? I said, Reed Hoffman. She said, well, who's he? I said, well, he's a big tech bro founded LinkedIn. And she said, why are you doing people on the podcast that your listeners won't have heard of? I said, well, I don't know, but Rory says he's amazing. So that's why I'm doing it.

So, and I think, you know, given that Rory so rarely brings in guests, I think, you know, I can't say that. No, I thought he was, I could have gone on talking to him all day.

I thought he was absolutely terrific.

Oh, thank you. He is actually unbelievably famous outside the circle of you, because he's one of the, I mean, one of the reasons he's very famous is that he's one of the very wealthiest people in the world. So he set up LinkedIn. He's on the main board of Microsoft. He's now launched this massive AI company with Mr. Suleiman. He was one of the earliest investors in Facebook, one of the earliest investors in Airbnb. And he's very, I think, particularly famous in the United States because he's seen as somebody who Silicon Valley looks to. I mean, he's seen as an interesting person. He took a very, very strong line, as you were saying, on Trump and Biden. But a lot of the interviews, I was really pleased

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that a lot of the interviews you get with him are about entrepreneurship. I mean, obviously, there's a huge following for him from people who want to set up businesses and want to work out how to be a billionaire. And so I think a lot of what he does is he's asked about strategy. He's asked about hiring. He's asked about firing. He's asked about how to select CEOs. So I thought it was nice to take him in directions. He doesn't usually go.

Also, I didn't, you know, I asked him about his, the role of money in his life. And maybe this is what they all say. They're kind of not motivated by money. They just happen to end up very, very wealthy. But I didn't get the feeling of somebody who was at all ostentatious. I mean, what's your sense of his kind of how he lives? I mean, presumably he does sort of fly around in private jets and all that sort of stuff. But is he kind of, he didn't, he didn't strike me as being sort of loudly ostentatiously wealthy. That's based on, you know, 80 minute conversation.

I have to be careful because I'm a friend of his and spend a lot of time with him. But no, he's, he lives pretty modestly. I mean, he's not, I haven't really asked him too much about this, but he's not somebody who seems to be very interested in fancy cars or fancy houses. He's got a very strong relationship with his wife, who is incredibly down to earth. They live in Washington state in a pretty cold, rainy part of the United States. Very, very beautiful. But it's not a sort of lavish kind of Hollywood lifestyle. And I think he's, he's genuinely honest about that. I didn't think he feels he really needs money. What he's doing, increasingly is earning money to put it into courses that he believes in. One of the things he said to me, he didn't say it on this podcast, but help me understand him a bit, is he said that he realized quite early on in life that one of the things he was good at was making money, and that one of the ways he could probably make most of a change in the world is by making money and then giving it to lots of other people. So he once said to me that rather than him trying to be an academic and just another philosopher, he could make money and maybe support 100 philosophers who are smarter than him. Yeah. I mean, he didn't want to, he didn't want to say how much he'd given to political campaigns, but we're talking sums of money that kind of dwarf anything that we hear about in the UK context. And I read that when he was fundraising for Obama, he got all his kind of mates together on a Zoom call with Obama and the entry price just out of the Zoom call was \$250,000. But he's kind of into the tens, hundreds of millions in terms of giving away wealth. I mean, again, I don't think it's sharing, as he said, he's close to Obama and they clearly like each other and respect each other. It's difficult actually interviewing somebody that you're close to. How easy did you find it when you were interviewing Tony Blair to kind of reflect on his lifestyle and his friendships and things? You sort of stay off that. Yeah, maybe. I think there are some things probably that you know about people that you don't necessarily want to get into. So for example, I will have talked to Tony or to David Miliband, if there were stuff going on at home that they were worried about and so forth. And I think it's unfair to kind of sort of bring that up as an interview, but in an interview. But no, I thought you did well there. I thought that, you know, it was, it was just very interesting. It's like, I mean, I obviously know his name, but I know nothing about him. And it's just, it's quite interesting to speak to somebody that you don't know much about, but you know that they're quite influential in their own way. So how did you, how did you first get to know? So we first met this grisly thing called the Bilderberg conference. Oh my God, here we go. Let's get the conspiracy theorists all fired up.

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That's right. That's it. That's it.

We talk about 15-minute cities and exactly all that kind of stuff. I don't know what I told you. One of the things that I discovered coming out of that conference, it was meant to be sort of secret that I'd attended. And then someone called a parliamentary debate, which I had to attend on why Rory Stewart attended the Bilderberg conference, which poor Ken Clark at the Dispatch

box had to go rah, rah, rah, rah, rah, rah and try to say it to me.

Anyway, one of the things I discovered from the whole thing is, you know, there's a big theory that the thing is run by lizard kings, alien lizard kings, we're alien lizard kings.

What I couldn't quite work out was whether-

Who is it run by? Who is Mr. Bilderberg?

I, embarrassingly, I don't know very much about it.

Is there other Freemasons? How did you, how did you get invited?

You get, you get, you get tapped on the shoulder and invited to go along. And of course, in my case, what you end up with is a very grumpy, bitter government whip who's really angry that they didn't get invited saying, no, you can't possibly go, you've got to vote on the, you know, Sunday trading bill on. And are you, are you told when you arrive that you can't possibly talk about who else is there? You can't divulge any of the, any of the details, details of the conference. Yeah.

But anyway, what I still haven't worked out though is whether I was an alien lizard king before I went or whether by going, I've now kind of grown a tale and become an alien lizard king.

I think I was one before I went. Yeah.

Did you, did you go to build, build a Berkwood set? You're very quiet about this.

Not a liberty to say. I mean, I can't, I can't, no, I've not, I've not. I, I find that I don't get tapped on the shoulder for these kinds of things. I think despite my now being officially a pensioner, I think I still am seen by some of these things as a bit of a sort of rogue possibility. I think people know that I don't like being a member of sort of exclusive clubs.

Yeah. Yeah. I can imagine that you might, might cause a bit, bit of trouble. Yeah.

Bit of trouble. Is there anything you wished you'd asked him that we didn't ask him if you want to do this again? No, there isn't because I think as a kind of,

as a pairing with Mustafa Suleiman, I think what was, I think I learned quite a lot from Mustafa Suleiman about that world and how it works and who's in it and what sort of people they are.

But I actually found with, found with, with Reid Hoffman, I just found kind of from the off almost a very interesting character and personality that there was lots to explore in, which is why it went off in all sorts of weird and wonderful directions,

like the philosophy of friendship. I'm very interested in friendship. I think it's a really interesting area of life. Yeah. We talk about friends without really thinking what we mean most of the time. And as I say, I think it's something you're, you're probably quite good at.

I'm very good. I'm good at everything. No, you're not good at everything, not good at everything.

Do you think so? No, not good at everything. Do you think I'll be very good as a build, a buildaberg? You'd definitely be rubbish at that. I definitely, I wasn't much good at that either.

I, I generally remember that. Did you hear any really interesting ideas?

A buildaberg? No, I'm not a Libertator. No, I didn't. I don't want to say what they are,

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but did you hear? No, I didn't. I didn't know. Nothing at all. No, it's pretty dull. It's the food nice. Food's nice, but the conversation's pretty dull. Are there any women there? Yes, honestly, we're not going to go, we're not going to keep getting dragged down this path. Do you have to wear a tie? I'm wearing one now. Do you have to wear a, do you have to wear a tie, a buildaberg? Yeah, I think I did. Yeah, I did. Very good. All right. Well, thank you very much doing that. And let's talk soon. Yeah, see you soon.