

[Transcript] Leading / David Baddiel: God, Anti-Semitism and the Y-Word

Hi there, it's Alistair Campbell here and before you listen to our leading interview with David Bedeal, just a word of warning, even to those of you who may be used to my Malcolm Tucker's approach to language, this one does contain some very strong language from the off. So if you're listening with children in the back of the car or running around the kitchen, you might want to plug in your headphones, but do enjoy the show.

Welcome to another episode of The Rest of Apologies, leading with me, Alistair Campbell. And with me, Rory Stewart.

With a kind of describing cultural icon.

Certainly was in the old days.

Okay, that's bad already. It was.

It was a cultural icon with the old footballs coming home and all that.

So comedian, first off, but has become kind of quite a serious cultural figure.

Well, let me let me read you the first bit of his latest book and see if anyone can guess.

I am an insomniac.

There are many potential reasons for this, most of them probably physical.

But if you're going to be psychoanalytical about it and look for something in my childhood, I'd say it was to do with death.

So he's insomniac, slightly worried about death.

The book, which is not yet published, I don't think it's bound to be published called The God Desire.

So we're going to find out whether he does or he doesn't do God.

And I think we'll probably give it away.

I think we've given away with the football stuff.

Also, I've spoken.

Now, my voice is very recognizable.

I guess so.

Okay.

So we're going to say who you are.

You are David Bedeal.

Yeah.

I mean, otherwise, the podcast becomes a who is this thing?

Which I think, you know, it's a whole other flag, isn't it?

That is a good title for a podcast.

Who is this?

So why are we here, David?

Is that a general question about life?

No, why are we?

Yes, it is about life.

What am I doing here at the Palladium?

Look, if you write a post called The God Desire, don't expect lot to be asked.

Why are we here?

Or as I'd like to say, what's it all about?

Well, the answer to both those questions, why are we here and what's it all about is there is no reason.

We're not here for any particular reason.

It's not about anything.

And as a result, we have created God along with various other narratives.

Who doesn't exist?

He doesn't exist, but we've created God.

The book is very, very clear.

I would love God to exist as a buffer to that nothingness and oblivion and pointlessness and to give meaning and purpose to our lives and to outsmart death.

And that's what The God Desire is.

So as an atheist book, which it is, it's fundamentally an atheist book.

It's different from most atheist books in that it's not about what was there something before the Big Bang or, you know, how can we exist without a moral compass that God...

All of those normal things that are discussed in atheist books, it's not about that.

It's about what I feel is at the heart of why God exists, because it's a given to me that He doesn't, which is that we are frightened and desperate and in need of comfort.

So He's a sort of father figure who's going to do everything for us and look after us and care for us and we desperately need that.

He's a superhero dad who chases off death and who wouldn't want that?

Before we get into politics, I wanted to start a little bit with you and your childhood.

Yeah, okay.

So give us a bit of a sense of how you grew up, who your parents were.

Okay.

My mum, who's referred to in the book that you just read, was a refugee from Nazi Germany. She was born in Nazi Germany.

In March, 1939, there's some confusion about that. When I did, who do you think you are?

Her papers were very confusing because I think some of them were forged in order to get her out of Germany.

But they got out at the last minute there.

And her parents were...

Her parents were originally, before Hitler came to power, my grandfather was an industrialist, quite a wealthy industrialist in a place called Königsberg.

And his name was...

His name was Ernst Fabian.

And Königsberg is where Emmanuel Kunt comes from.

Yes, it sounds like you said Kunt, they're afraid, but...

How do you pronounce K-A-N-T except in the way that I did?

Kunt.

In German?

Kunt.

I don't know.

Try once more.

Kunt.

Yeah.

I mean, I think it's simpler for us all if we call it Kunt.

Otherwise, I feel we're calling, you know, the person who wrote Critique of Pure Reason a Kunt. And that's who wants to do that.

Yeah.

Anyway, your grandfather came from...

Königsberg.

Königsberg, for an only last name.

And it's a long way out, right? Towards Russia.

Well, yeah, I've been there.

And now it is in Russia.

Before Second World War, it had been a university town, as you say, where Kunt came from and very beautiful.

And then it was bombed to fuck during Second World War.

And the Russians...

The Russian word and the F word.

Yeah, sorry about that.

And it's hideous now.

Sorry for any Königsberg, not...

Kalinin gradians, which is what we're just calling now, listening.

But it's kind of the arse end of the old Soviet Union now.

But they were industrialists.

And very, very wealthy?

Really wealthy, as far as I can make out.

I mean, I think they had servants and stuff.

And they had a big society wedding, my grandparents.

But then from 1933 onwards, that obviously all went.

And by 1939, they had nothing.

And my grandfather had been in a concentration camp.

We'd been in Dachau after Kristallnacht.

And he was forced to clean up the rubble of his synagogue with a number of other Jews and sent to a concentration camp.

And they lost everything else they had, getting him out of that camp, bribing people to get him out of that camp.

And then with literally three weeks to go before the war broke out, they just managed to get into this country.

The wider family were killed.

And then you came here, or your mother came here.

My mum then met my dad.

Right, but hold on. And then you became a comedian and did a whole show about your family, which I reckon if I'd done a show about my parents as intimate and as detailed about their lives together as that,

I think I'd have got a bit of a smack around the chops.

Well, luckily, my mum was dead.

Luckily, sounds weird in that particular case.

And my father had dementia by that time. But I would say that show, if we talk about that show, was

a huge act of love.

Do you know about the show, Roy?

I did a one-woman show in the West End, a one-woman show.

It wasn't a one-woman show because it was made about my mum, although people seem to think it was made about my dad.

Is this where you talk about the fact that she had an affair with a man and collected golf memorabilia?

Yes, my mum collected golf memorabilia in a very extreme way.

She turned her whole lives over to golfing memorabilia, so you couldn't exist in our house without seeing somewhere a statue of Lee Trevino.

What's the example of golf memorabilia, sorry?

Lots and lots of deco pics of her playing golf.

She wrote eight books about coffee table books, cool things like The Source Book of Golf, Golf the Golden Years, Out on the Links, things like that.

She had a stall in the Grey's antique market down the road from here.

Did they publish these books?

They did publish, yeah.

I think Golf the Golden Years sold about 100,000 copies, but she did a very shit deal for it and didn't get any money.

And this is because her lover was a great golfer.

Yeah, so the key thing is that this guy, but name him, his name is David White, and he may still be alive.

I think he lives in Slovenia.

He was a golfing memorabilia guy, collector of golf memorabilia, and literally got, we loved football in our house.

I grew up in my dad, he was Welsh and working class with three sons, and we loved football.

That was the only sport ever mentioned in our house.

My mum, not very bothered with football, not very bothered with any sport.

One day, becomes obsessed with golf, starts a golfing memorabilia business called Golfiana, which was the name of the business that David White also ran.

She just nicked whole bits of his life, and it really was just a homage.

And was he very glamorous?

I think in her eyes, yes.

If you saw a picture of him now, you'd think he looked like Roger Whitaker, right?

He had a kind of polo neck, he smoked a pipe, he had a beard, and he was a member of various golf clubs,

which in 1973 to a Jew would have felt glamorous because it was still restricted at that time.

So she ended up having come from a moderately wealthy background in Europe.

Well, she would not have known anything about that.

She wouldn't have known it, but she might have been aware of it.

And then she comes here and marries this kind of working-class, very kind of angry guy.

A well-shouty guy who loved her initially, I think.

Why did she marry him?

Well, I think lots of people got married in the late 50s and 60s because that was the way they had

sex, wasn't it?

Like, there wasn't much choice.

I'm not sure.

I'm not sure.

Our parents also got married roughly that period.

And to have sex.

And might have quite liked each other.

Looking at their diary, the diary of my mum.

My dad didn't write diaries. He's a very unemotional man.

But I think she did love him at the time.

But my mum never wouldn't have known her own mind.

And also, my dad was quite handsome then, and he was an intellectual.

He was doing chemistry.

He got out of the working-class environment he lived in via getting a PhD in chemistry in Imperial College.

And at the time, later on, he got made redundant and his life turned to shit.

But at that point, he would have seen quite a prospect.

She was very pretty.

What there wasn't, I think, was an intellectual connection between them at all.

And what I think Alice was going to say, which I think is true,

is that when my mum was disappointed in the mid-70s with her life and her marriage,

this guy appeared and it was a version of the life that she might have had

if the Nazis had never appeared, because if the Nazis had never appeared,

she would have probably married some kind of Austrian prince in her mind.

And although he was not an Austrian prince, he was a golfing memorabilia salesman,

that's the best that Cricklewood in 1975 could provide.

So what was Cricklewood in 1975 like for a kid?

Quite rough in Dollish Hill where we lived.

I went to an Orthodox Jewish primary school, the North West London Jewish Day School,

and I went there despite the fact that we were not an Orthodox Jewish family.

It's complicated. Basically, my mum's parents were alive.

So she'd got out with her parents.

They lived in Cambridge in one bedroom flat for many years,

but they still kept Jewish stuff going.

But my dad couldn't be bothered with any of that.

He used to call it Oli Woli Boli, prayers.

But everyone we used to do, like, say tonight, pass it.

He would say, I'm sorry, I'm going to swear again.

When can we get over the fucking Oli Woli Boli and just eat, right?

But my mum kind of kept it going, but it wasn't really an Orthodox house.

However, the only school near us that adieu would probably not get beaten up,

or at least have some trouble, was that school.

And it was an Orthodox school.

So I went to school wearing a yarmulke and sitsit,

which are sort of internal vestings,
learning Hebrew, praying for every meal, et cetera, et cetera,
and then going home and having bacon sandwiches.

So it was weird.

One thing that you sometimes hear, and whether it's true,
but I was talking to communities in North London
who claimed that there had been a big shift in education,
that schools were much more mixed in the 60s and 70s,
and that it's actually been increasingly the case
that people are sending their children to Jewish and Jewish schools.
Many of the people I was talking to had themselves been to schools
where they were 10 or 20% of a mixed population,
but they'd very much made the decision that their own kids
were going to go to Jewish-owned schools.

But that wasn't your experience.

Well, I don't really know why you went to that school.

Well, my younger brother didn't go to that school.

My younger brother went to a school called Ale Stone,
and he once said to me to try and describe how hard Ale Stone was
that another kid had burnt down the assembly hall and got suspended,
which I think is kind of brilliant.

So the schools were rough around there,
but North London Jewish day school was not because Jewish schools are not.
Which is not to say there wasn't difficulties.

I remember there being people throwing stones and chanting outside the school,
because that's what it was like in the 1970s.

The final thing before we move forward out of your parents' grandparents,
did you know your mother's parents well?

What did it feel like for your grandfather to go from being
a prosperous man in Königsberg to living in a one bedroom flat in Cambridge?
Did you get a sense of his journey?

Yeah, laterally I did.

I mean, it's quite hard for a young kid to take him when I was 11.

I said to my grandma, did you have any brothers and sisters?

And she said you'd have to ask Mr. Hitler what happened to them,
which was, I remember really weird at the time,
because all I really knew about Mr. Hitler was the guy in dad's army theme tune.
But she meant that her brother had been killed,
and I later found out probably in the Warsaw ghetto,
possibly to Rage and such that, which is incredible.

That's my great uncle, who I know his name, his name is Arno.

But that's what they came from.

They came from that level of trauma.

He was in and out of mental hospitals,

mainly full-bulm in Cambridge for the rest of his life.
He worked as a porter in a hotel in Cambridge, in the Garden Hotel.
Having managed a business when he was in Cambridge.
Yeah, they owned a brick factory.
Abramoski and Fabian, I've got a little advert.
So he went from managing lots of people to being a porter and a...
Yeah, I mean, in his forties.
He never really spoke English.
She did really well, she had a very heavy job.
There's nothing you need to remember is,
the British government, I've written a novel about this.
My third novel is called The Secret Purposes,
and it's about the internment of Jewish German refugees on the Isle of Man
during the Second World War.
That's what happened to my grandfather in 1940.
And this is very interesting in terms of,
I did mention Gary Linnick before we got here,
but in terms of the migrant hysteria now,
there was migrant hysteria about Jewish immigrants in 1940.
And what there was also was the British government was suppressing information
about the Holocaust because they didn't want British people to think
they were fighting war on behalf of the Jews.
As a result, many people thought and egged on by the papers,
especially the Daily Express, the Daily Mail,
what are all these foreigners doing here?
And of course, they were Jewish German refugees,
but they weren't really understood as such.
Churchill, as a result, in June 1940,
he said this thing, collar the lot.
And what he meant was, we're going to arrest every single German living in Britain,
99% of which are Jewish German refugees, including my grandfather,
and in turn them on the art of man for two years.
Okay, so let's fast forward.
We'll come back to football and comedy and all that,
but as you've raised Gary Linnick and the recent sort of controversy
over what he said and the kind of convulsion of controversy that he aroused.
And he is the executive producer of this podcast?
He's the, you know, as per the BBC New Rules,
we have to say that this podcast is owned by the...
And I'm really worried I'm going to lose my job.
Who co-founded this wonderful company.
Yeah, but this is not a BBC production,
so I think you can say what you like basically.
No, but my point is that part of the nonsense of the kind of controversies

that every time I went on television to talk about it,
the BBC felt the need to point out this...

Yeah, right.

As you just did.

Yeah, because it's funny.

So, the point is that I actually think what you just said
kind of backs up what he was saying.

Not what they said he was saying, but what he was saying.

I don't agree.

Because?

Well, I actually said this and I actually sent it to Gary,
which is, if you want to make a 1930s analogy, there is one.

And that is to talk about how the British press and indeed black shirts
were in the 1930s towards Jewish immigrants fleeing from Germany.

And they were using the language of...

Invasion.

Invasion.

No, because that is, I'm afraid, different from the language of the actual Nazis
towards, and this is a key point, which I think I was the first person to make,
actually, but I'm now seeing more people make it,
towards their own citizens.

Now, I've seen some people say,
well, what difference does it make?

They're all human beings.

There is a difference.

The Nazis turned their hate, extreme hate, and not by the way people say,
oh, it was different from 1923 when they turned their hate on their own citizens.

My grandfather had roots in Germany going back to the 19th century.

They were Germans.

They were not immigrants.

So what would be equivalent is to Ella Braverman saying to me or any other minority group,
living in Britain, you are vermin, you need to go.

You can't marry a British citizen.

You can't work.

Okay, but one of the consequences...

She didn't do that.

No, but one of the consequences of the politics that she pursues is that people who live in
this country feel ostracised, feel marginalised, feel hated, feel that they are part of the
swarm, the invasion.

That's why you're getting all these protests outside hotels, housing asylum seekers.

Well, I'm not denying that she's othering the immigrants.

She is othering, right?

But I think the point is, it's a complex point to do with what we're presumably going to
move on to, which is the Jews don't count phenomenon, which is part of...

I've got to say you're brilliant at plugging all your books.

Thanks.

Three massive plugs already.

You should hear him on his books.

Part of the Jews don't count phenomenon and the Jews don't count phenomenon is about how my thinking that particularly in progressive circles that issues around antisemitism, around Jewish inclusion, Jewish representation are dialed down.

And I agree with that.

One of those issues is that there's a sort of what Deborah Lipschak calls soft core holocaust denial.

And part of that is a tendency to use the holocaust as an analogy for all sorts of things that are not really comparable to the holocaust.

And the key element of that is that when Jews, as they often do, like slightly say, actually this isn't really what it's like.

It's not really comparable.

What you get is huge blowback from the left, as if the Jews somehow own this and therefore are saying that you can't possibly get...

And there are things.

There are things.

For example, the Uighurs in China, they are Chinese citizens.

They are being put in camps.

Correct.

They are being sterilized.

Correct.

That is analogous.

Okay?

There are still differences, but it's okay.

That's analogous.

What Gary Liker said was the policy is a measurably cruel, which it is, and that the debate surrounding

it is redolent of the 30s in Germany.

And I think that's true.

Let me try to put David's point.

It's not actually redolent to the way that people in 1930s Germany talked about their insurgency.

It's a different thing.

It's quite different to the way that Hitler perceived Germans.

Well, also, I'm very interested in specificity.

That's what I'm interested in.

I know that.

It's very intellectual and historical specificity.

Which is that Twitter is not a great addition to the world.

No, I agree with that.

I agree with that.

So Gary tweets something and sets off a debate.
But I'm saying that the kernel of the debate, he's right.
Also, can I just say something else?
I think Gary should be able to say what he likes.
It's crazy that someone who is not a journalist and someone who is a private citizen and, you know, he works for the BBC, but that doesn't mean that he represents the BBC.
He is not allowed to basically say what he likes.
The partiality stuff is, I'm totally thinking he should be allowed to say what he likes.
And the BBC just needed to sort out that.
But that's different from the fact that, particularly since social media, which in its binaries, leads to extremities.
And one of those extremities is, I'm going to compare the thing that I'm angry about to the Nazis.
And the problem with that, if you're actually someone whose mother, she's not a distraught, whose mother's life was destroyed.
David, I think there's a thing here where...
So I've looked at the language of the 30s in Hitler's time.
And I've looked at the language of Mussolini.
And there's so many echoes.
So what is it that the Tories are saying that is similar to what Hitler was saying about the Jews?
He is saying that the language that was used by Soller-Breffen is similar to the language used in Britain in the 1930s.
It's not similar to the language used in Germany in the 1930s.
And that's a different order.
The discrepancies of the actual analogy we can argue about.
What I am very concerned about, and this is the whole point about Jews being allowed to have some place at the conversation, which they're often not allowed to have, is that the Holocaust is very important in the way that Jews understand how they perceive how they are vulnerable.
I get that.
So Jewish ownership of...
It's the same thing about, like I said to you earlier, what I often say to left-wing people when they try and tell me what isn't isn't anti-Semitism.
In a way, people trying to tell me what isn't isn't the Holocaust is the same thing.
Because the Holocaust is the acme of anti-Semitism.
I agree with what you say about anti-Semitism.
I thought you made an incredibly important point.
And I think your whole concept of the hierarchy of racism is incredibly important.
And it's a point that I'm 100% support.
Let's get back to Jews' account and give us a minute on the thesis of that book.
Well, the thesis of the book, which we've sort of slightly covered, is that I had the impression and the context is very important, which I think is correct that in the last 20 years, there's been a massive intensification of what is called identity politics.
So politics has now shifted, for me, slightly away, whether it has in reality, but certainly

within the conversation from about being sort of economics and class, whatever, to being about what we call identity.

And that is a whole branch of what could be ethnicity, which is my primary subject, but it also includes sexuality and gender.

And curiously, just to interrupt, one of the strange things is that a lot of the identity politics of the 70s and 80s was much more focused on class.

This is one thing to be honest about, that actually the shift has been less focused on class and more focused on issues of ethnicity, sexuality, gender, etc.

Yeah, that's what I think has happened.

And within that intensification, there's a lot of good things, I think.

There's some not so good things, but in general, a heightened awareness that there are identities within the culture that don't necessarily operate with enough inclusion, enough representation, enough sense that things are being said about them, that lived experiences, dismissed, etc. etc.

I think in general, we're undergoing a period of correction about that and people are trying to be more aware of those things than they used to be.

Within that conversation, it seemed to me, certainly when I wrote the book, that Jews were not really included, that it wasn't a big deal, that anti-Semitism wasn't such a big issue for the people who were very worried about racism, that it wasn't even understood as racism, that it was thought of as religious intolerance, which as I've often said is clearly incorrect because I'm an atheist, as that book proves, and the Gestapo would shoot me tomorrow.

So those things, and indeed, like within diversity quotients, like the one thing you wouldn't have got somewhere in the book, there's been a slight shift since then, is someone saying we need to include when we're doing a diversity initiative some information, education or anti-Semitism.

Now I think that is happening and I get asked to do it a lot.

I'll be honest, I think that's a result of the book and other conversations.

And the fact of Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party making this issue so prevalent.

Can we touch on that a little bit?

What is your sense on Corbyn in the 1970s, and do you think he was an anti-Semite?

So I answered this recently on Bethwig B. Show, so there's two things, I actually thought I shouldn't have answered it, not because I can't answer it, but because that was actually on Holocaust Memorial Day, and I am, as we know, somewhat precious about the Holocaust, and I thought if I answer this, it will just be certainly on social media, what blows up and what everyone talks about, but because I'm kind of polite, despite swearing a lot on this, I didn't say I don't want to answer that, so I did answer it and that is what happened.

And I kind of wish I hadn't, partly also because I think anti-Semitism is a very complex and also very ancient issue.

And within the political conversation, certainly in Britain, there's a slight sense that it's all about Labour Party 2015 to 2019, and there's massively deep social and psychological malaise to do with anti-Semitism that goes back centuries and centuries and centuries.

And so I tend to be, let's not talk about Corbyn, a bit like I am about Israel, it's

a much more complicated issue.

Having said that, and I can show you what's wrong with the conversation, with what happened with the answer.

So what I said is, I do not believe at the front of his mind that Jeremy Corbyn is an anti-Semite.

And I used the example of that mural that he supported, the picture that went up in East London a while ago, a mural of some very, very hook-nosed bearded men, rich men playing Monopoly on the backs of the world's poor, and some Jewish people complained about it. And the artist said, oh, I see some old white, very important word, white Jewish folk who got upset about my portrayals of their beloved Warburg and their beloved Rothschild.

I mean, this is a progressive guy sounding like Goebbels, right?

And Jeremy Corbyn supported him, and when I used the phrase at the front of his mind, I got massive hate on Twitter.

And in fact, Jeremy Corbyn himself said, what does he mean?

It's in my psychiatrist.

How does he know what's at the front or back of my mind?

And I realized then that I should have said Jeremy Corbyn is showing unconscious bias.

Because what my whole thing, to some extent, is about is, I am modeling the language of vocabulary of identity politics, and I'm showing how it doesn't apply to Jews, and I must just say this.

And I truly believe that if anyone was to say to Jeremy Corbyn or any other progressive about any other minority, I think you're showing an example of unconscious bias here, they would at least stop and think about it and think, well, it's not my place to say, out there, you're not my psychiatrist.

But that's not what happens with Jews.

And you were actually trying to say something inoffensive.

Well, nuanced.

Nonstop.

You certainly weren't trying to say, I don't think he is an anti-Semite in the way.

I think Hitler was an anti-Semite, and I believe Kanye West is an anti-Semite.

These are people who directly say very, very negative, murderous things about Jews.

Absolutely.

He would never say anything like that.

And I do not believe he would think it.

How do you feel about Labour now today?

Because you're basically a Labour person.

Yeah, I voted Labour all my life.

I didn't vote Labour in the 2019 lecture.

I can't remember if I did in 2017.

Was that the previous one?

Yeah, 17.

Why didn't you?

In 2019, I had become someone who did believe that there was too much of an issue with really just this sort of not listening to aspect of the Jewish issue.

I felt that Jews were saying there's a problem here, and they were being dismissed.
And what were the problems?
So there was the mural.
What were the other problems?
Well, lots of other specific problems like there's that book, Imperialism, which is a very good example.
A lot of the time, what I was trying to point out with the mural and that book, Imperialism by Hobson, if I felt with Corbyn and with quite a few people on the left, they feel there are bigger issues going on.
So with the mural, it's about world poverty.
And that's the important thing.
And it's just irritating if people think, but they've represented them in an anti-Semitic way.
That's annoying, and it's a distraction.
Similarly, Imperialism is a big book about Imperialism in which Hobson just says there is a race of Jewish financiers.
It's a sort of late early 20th century book who are controlling Imperialism and it's their responsibility.
And Corbyn wrote just a glowing forward without any mention of that.
Not because he's an anti-Semite, because anti-Semitism is not big, it's not important on his list of issues.
And how much do you think?
I mean, obviously...
Sorry, within the labor body, there was lots of other stuff going on.
So if you actually hear, for example, the way that Luciana Berger was sort of alienated out of her local labor party, it's sort of really unpleasant and violent.
And how much is...
So I live now in Jordan.
How much of this...
You live in Jordan?
I live in Jordan.
I live in Amman in Jordan.
That is really quite a commute.
I know you had a hard time with the Tory party.
You'd have to leave the country, go and live in Jordan.
So I'm wondering how much of this is driven by people's views about Palestinian-issue, how much of this is Muslims in the labor party.
I don't understand the context of what's going on here.
Have you read my book?
No.
Okay.
So one of the things I say in it is that I personally, there's a very short bit about Israel and I make a point of not talking very much about Israel because I think there's an assumption, again, on the left, that the whole conversation is about Israel.

So for example, Tariq Ali, as an example of a very progressive person, Adam Hyde Park March in support of the Palestinians a couple of years ago, said if the state of Israel would end the occupation, antisemitism would disappear.

So the state of Israel was started in 1948.

There was quite a big antisemitic incident just before that.

There's no way in the world that antisemitism is just about Israel.

And the notion that it's all about Israel is dismissive of antisemitism, in my opinion.

Unquestionably, it is still important.

Unquestionably, it is used by the left.

And the most bold and annoying way it's used by the left, and this is partly why I refuse to talk about Israel, is that if you're talking about antisemitism, nothing to do with Israel, say online, someone will instantly say, what about Palestine?

It's as if you can't talk about that subject without putting your cards and telling them about Israel first.

Will you at some point get round, do you think, in your life to focusing on Israel and Palestine, taking it seriously as an issue?

No, I don't not take it seriously as an issue.

I just think it's not...

But is it something that you inform yourself about?

I do.

I inform myself about it.

Do you travel there?

Do you think about it?

I do.

But I don't feel...

This is part of my thinking, Rory, is that I think it is not my responsibility to either defend or attack Israel as a Jew, because that is not a stricture placed on any other minority in relation to any other country.

If I was a British Muslim, and I wanted to talk about Islamophobia in the Tory party, for example, I don't think anyone would say, well, first of all, I'd like to know how you feel about what's happening in Iran, or human rights in Saudi Arabia.

Can we clear that up first?

This is a sort of mirror of Jews that are not counting.

Yeah, it's the same thing.

It's a way in which there's a sort of arbitration that happens with Jews, between Jews and what they want to talk about.

There has to be a serious hoops and hurdles that they have to go through, and I reject those.

Well, we're going to have a short break, then we'll come back and explore, first of all, what you're going to do at the next election.

I'll vote Labour at the next election.

OK, well, I know.

I'll vote Labour at the next election.

And then the second thing, I think Rory would be fascinated to hear your account of your

conversations with his former leader, Mr Cameron.

OK, take a break.

Welcome back to the Restless Politics, leading with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Azad Campbell.

And we have David Baddiel with us.

I just wanted to finish up, and I think a really interesting conversation you were getting into, which is the question of how much Jewish identity is bound up with conversations around Israel, Palestine.

And I think you've made a very good point.

And I guess let me try to see whether I've got an analogy here.

Often when I was teaching in the States, people would think because I was a sort of upper middle class British person, I needed to take responsibility for the British Empire, and I needed to provide a big analysis of slavery in the 19th century and the responsibility of Britain towards Indianism.

Is that analogous?

I don't think it's quite analogous because I don't think an upper middle class English bloke is a minority.

All of this has to be keyed into the fact my thinking is that Jews need to be counted as a minority, as a vulnerable minority, which is what they aren't thought of because of the Jewish association with privilege and power.

But my point is, no, we are a vulnerable minority because of years and years and years of persecution that is ongoing.

Because you don't suffer.

I don't, by the way, I don't think you should have to answer for that, particularly it seems a bit mad.

But I wouldn't say it's something that I would consider in the conversation around how you talk to minorities about minority experience.

I'm very interested in this.

I mean, I think you've got yourself a very interesting angle into the word just your identity.

And I think one of the things that is both revealing and troubling around it is that it cuts in both directions.

You're cutting in the direction of saying that Jews as a vulnerable minority who've experienced immense historic suffering, hatred and abuse, should be considered alongside other minorities.

I'm not saying exactly the same way, but there are differences.

But you also, it cuts in another direction too.

Sometimes there's a sort of a reduction taking place here where you're pointing to things which are odd about the way that identity politics in general works.

And the more that you keep claiming this, there's a risk that somebody like me listening to it is like, where does this end?

Okay.

So what you need to know about that is I am not saying in the book, oh, I desperately

want the sort of madder ends of what happens when identity politics becomes the way we all think and the kind of trigger culture happens and everyone becomes offended about everything to necessarily be applied to Jews.

I'm just saying, I'm modeling how that is thought about, how that is talked about with other minorities and asking the question, why are Jews left out of this and what does that mean for how people think about Jews?

How people take that is another conversation, but it's not a manifesto about, and now I want people to get incredibly angry every time there's a tiny bit of what might be considered to be casual antisemitism, which by the way, is never going to happen.

It's never going to happen.

We need to talk about language because I thought it was fascinating in the book.

You talk about how nobody will use the P word rightly, apart from maybe a few far right racists in the privacy of their own homes.

Nobody will use the N word, but the Y word gets used a lot and it gets sung at football matches.

And I want you to tell Roy the story about your exchange with David Cameron.

One of the, so I start the book, and indeed I started the film that I did about Jews that can't feel like for Channel 4, with a series of examples of what I call the Jews don't count phenomenon.

I then go on to try and explain why I think this is happening to do with the privilege thing and the whiteness of Jews or whatever.

But one of the, probably the most violent example is that me and my brother go to Chelsea every home game and we have put up with for 20 years, 30 years, the fact that because there is this association of Tottenham Hotspur with a sort of phantom idea as a racist idea of Jewishness, because they are located in the fairly Jewish, that they are called Yids.

And I'm going to use the word they are called Yids and their fans, not only chant Yids and Yid Army, but it's said back to them, which is the key thing by Chelsea fans and Arsenal fans and West Ham fans in extreme ways, including with Holocaust stuff, spurs are on their way to Auschwitz, all that kind of stuff.

He's seen to simulate gas change and that's gone on for years and years and years.

And there was one particular incident where me and my brother were at Chelsea and that chance started, we weren't even playing spurs and then it was directed at us, but me and my brother with people just going fuck the Jews, fuck the Jews over and over again.

And my point is not that there was an anti-Semite at a football match.

My point is that that happens.

The point is stewards by then and in the program, and this is my point about the conversation and about identity politics, by then 2009, the program said, any racism heard in the grounds will lead to immediate ejection and a banning for life.

Nothing happened.

Literally, no one said anything, the stewards just because it didn't count or didn't hear it.

They didn't even recognize it as racism.

And then we did a film about it called the Y word, but that was difficult to get on and blah, blah, blah.

Anyway, the story, which is a funny story, but sort of also very indicative.

I say in the book that if you want to believe, because a lot of people question the study of the hierarchy of racism, but if you want to sort of prove it in an a priori way, Alistair is right.

No one here, no one in this room would use the N word and the P word, which is a good thing, but I can say the word, I am Jewish, but I reckon either of you could say it and it would not be the end of your career.

But we could talk about it and say, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. No, it would definitely not be the end of your career.

And I'll prove it.

Why?

I'll prove why.

I mean, obviously this was a little while ago, but not that long ago.

When I first started talking about this, it became a bit of an issue.

A lot of people disagreed.

They started saying that Spurs fans should be allowed to say it and blah, blah, blah.

And in 2014, I think it was, David Cameron was, I think, asked by a journalist who doorstepped him at number 10 from the Jewish Chronicle what he thought about that.

And he said, I think Spurs fans should be allowed to call themselves Yids.

I think it's fine for Spurs fans to call themselves Yids.

Then there was a funny incident where I was on the agenda, which you may remember, Tom Bradbury's program, and he was on it.

And I'm waiting in the green room, Cameron was on it.

And he was the prime minister.

So he came in, but he comes in, he bustles into the green room.

He comes straight over to me and he says, again, with no compunction, I'm a Jew, with no compunction, are we going to talk about the Yidd thing?

And I said, I don't know.

You'll have to ask Tom Bradbury.

And he said, well, I just want to say, if we're going to talk about the Yidd thing, you're right.

I've spoken to Lord Feldman and he says, but deal's right about this.

I'm just going to say, you're right.

And what I took from that is not that he'd listened to Lord Feldman, a Jew, but that he would not, I think, in 2015, have gone up to a person of color and use any of the hate words about a person of color, even while saying, you're right.

He wouldn't have done that.

And the reason he wouldn't have done that is that Jewish hate speech is not as hateful.

It's seen as not as hateful or as bad because Jews don't count, but more importantly, Jews are not seen as a vulnerable minority.

Do you think it affects anything that David Cameron is interested in his own Jewish identity and Jewish heritage?

You're not really aware of his Jewish heritage.

So he's a quarter Jewish and I think something he talks about a little bit.

And I guess...

I don't think when he came up to me and said that...

And in fact, it was famous to famous...

He was saying as one Jew to another, I think we could use his word.

But the reason this was relevant is that actually I also got in trouble with this because he produced a poster of flying pigs with David Cameron and Oliver Lettwin.

No, it was Michael Howard.

It was Michael Howard, so yeah.

That makes quite a big difference because Michael Howard is what you might call properly Jewish.

Yeah.

I mean, this is the trouble, to some extent, with anti-Semitism, is that someone said to me about this book, a progressive person, said on Twitter about Jews don't count, oh, I think I'm a progressive person, but I actually realized I share some of these assumptions and I realize now that anti-Semitism is the racism that sneaks past you.

And my book is to some extent a primer to spot these things because it is quite an elusive thing.

And I personally, as a Jew, think that when Anne Widdicombe said that Michael Howard has something of the night about him, that there is an anti-Semitism there, I don't think she's aware of it.

No.

I think that is an unconscious...

So was I victim to unconscious bias when I put...

We put a poster out with Michael Howard and Oliver Letwin's heads on pigs when it literally did not cross my mind.

Literally not.

No.

No.

Because apart from anything, pigs are not kosher, right?

That is not.

Pigs are actually not an example used much, as far as I'm aware, in tropes about Jews. Jews are more...

The tropes about Jews, the anti-Semitic tropes are more about vermin or about huge fat capitalists controlling the world, or horrible sexual tropes of them sort of approaching young Aryan women, blah, blah, blah, blah, but pigs is actually not used very much as a trope around Jews.

Well, the Jewish community will not happen with me, I suppose.

Yeah.

I wouldn't have been bothered about it.

But, you know, I'm an outlier in many ways.

So you're increasingly, I mean, you're a serious writer, I mean, I'm looking here at a...

Serious writer of short books.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I found my niece writing short books and I'm happy with that.

Yeah.

I'm looking here at 12 books.

Is that right?

Yeah, I think so.

I mean, nine of them...

Not nine of them.

Seven or eight children's books.

But children's books are, I think, and also a great thing to write.

And you were doing a thesis at university in English literature, is that right?

I did a long time ago.

I mean, to be honest with you, even though I think that was a good piece of work in its own way, I did it mainly because I had no money when I left university and I needed to get some money.

And back then, you could get a grant to do a PhD, which allowed me to do comedy at the same time.

And what was your thesis going to be on?

What was it?

It was about Victorian sexuality and literature, is what it was about.

And what was your big idea?

My big idea was about the, I believe that the way that women were represented by a lot of the big male writers in the 19th century shows a inability to imagine women as an actual, as actually kind of like sort of sexual being.

So the only versions of women that were allowed in the 19th century by Dickens and people like that tended to be sort of idealized little girls, quite creepy idealized little girls or very maternal wife, mother figures.

So for example, in *Dombie and Son*, Florence Dombie is a tiny little girl for most of the book, sort of angelic, like Little Nell.

Then she goes to China in the middle of the book to completely erase any actual sexual growth on her part and comes back with three children.

You went through studying English literature, you were obviously very good at English literature at Cambridge.

You went on to do your doctorate.

You could almost become an academic if you wanted to.

My grandma, the one who was in Germany, wanted nothing more than for me to be Dr. Badille and to have a PhD.

And even though she was still alive when I first was on the telly, she was not happy about it.

She's just pissed off.

I guess one of the questions is, is your perspective on the world the way you do comedy, the kind of humor you see, the kind of criticism you see, does that have a link back to the tradition of the type of criticism you applied to Victorian sexuality, for example?

I don't know that so much about comedy.

I think the books...

There's a PhD in that question.

Yeah, there is.

I think the books.

Well, someone said, which is not exactly the answer to your question, but it might have an adjacent answer to your question, is a Jewish academic who's read that book and God Design, which is my new book, and you don't count, said that I have a Talmudic way of looking at these questions.

And if anyone's read the Talmud, which I haven't, but what I have a sense of the Talmud is that it's very, very digging into the deep logical questions of life.

And I do, I think, do that in these books.

I have a very, very, like, what is actually happening under the skin of these quite complicated questions.

And what I do include in both these books, the God Design and Jews Again, is jokes.

So I also have...

I see no reason why if you're doing some quite hefty intellectual, rigorous work, you shouldn't put a gain.

And is your comedy also based on looking at structures or uncovering hidden structures?

I don't know.

My comedy now tends to be very, very...

So I take one subject, so my last three standard shows, I've taken one subject.

Fame was the first one.

Then my family, and lastly, Trolls, and tries to re...

Well, actually it is, yeah, because it tries to dig into what's going on here.

The family one was just very personal.

Tell us about fame.

The fame one was about how...

And you'll both know this, like, personal to me in a way, because I spent a lot of my time trying to project a version of myself that I feel is authentic, because I don't like to be inauthentic.

I'm not very good at playing someone who is not me.

But as you'll know, Erika Young said, the more famous you are, the more people will get you wrong.

So what fame involves is mistaken identity, literally, in my case, where people mistake Ian Brody of The Lightning Seeds or Ben Elton, or whoever it might be for me.

I'll tell a quick story about how Roland Keating of Boyzone came up to me once and said, I love your work.

I'm so pleased.

I love your work.

Everything you do is brilliant.

What I particularly like was Blackadder.

And I said, I'm not Ben Elton, and he looked really pissed off, like I was deliberately trying to trick him with my face.

I was in mistake of a Nick Clegg the other day, which was Nick Clegg.

I once got a free meal in a restaurant in Swansea because someone thought I was Steve

Wright, which I really don't know about the DJ.

No, I can see it now.

But the fame thing was about that.

It's about how there's a version of you out there that is not you, and that's destabilizing, but it's also kind of funny.

And that's why you're obsessed with trolls.

Well, the trolls thing was about, I think, so it came from something very specific, actually, which is that when I first started dealing with trolls on social media, I thought they were hecklers.

And as a comedian, I thought, I can't ignore these, I can't not feed the trolls.

I've got to try and make it funny.

They're abusing me from the dock, so I need to make it funny.

And I would do that, and I made a show out of it, really.

But it was also a show about what does it mean, this level of abuse that's just in public support now, because I think there was a time when you were actually obsessed with social media.

That's a dangerous degree.

Yeah.

So how do you define the history of your relationship with social media?

Because I think Rory's a little bit in this entry into this space a bit.

He doesn't tweet that much.

Nobody looks at it a lot.

Oh, do you?

You look.

I don't know.

I think it's an interesting...

I think, as Alice's amateur unpaid therapist, used to get very wound up on social media.

You could get wound up on social media.

Incredibly angry on Twitter.

I do, but I don't get wound up by social media.

I get...

So if I'm like...

You're sure the algorithm's not true anymore?

The key element...

It's interesting that, because the key element I always say with hecklers is don't get angry.

If anything, agree with them and then take my down.

I don't even look at them.

I get so...

We're doing this while Boris Johnson's giving evidence.

If we were giving...

If I was watching Johnson now, I'd probably be tweeting every minute, because I want to say what I think about what I'm seeing.

I don't care about what people then say what I say, whereas I've got a feeling that you really care.

No, I don't anymore.

I think that would be true of me a few years ago.

But actually, what I realized was that the whole treating them like hecklers thing is impossible because normally, if you're in a room and you've got a heckler in an audience of 800 people, it's one person and they shut up sooner after you've taken them down, right?

But that doesn't happen on social media.

They come back about that.

It's thousands and thousands and they take your stuff out of context and it becomes maddening and impossible.

And so, latterly, I've completely changed my opinion about it.

Having said, publicly, oh yeah, you should treat them like hecklers and you should make them funny or whatever, I now don't use it as an engagement platform.

I do it very occasionally, but most of them I say something and don't check responses now.

So you've been very successful, you know, famous guy, books, plays, television, films, films, music.

I haven't even talked about that.

I haven't talked about music.

We're going to end with that.

We're going to sing it together.

But do you reckon kind of happy person, has this made you a happy person?

Yeah, I think that I always think that people who complain about being famous unless it's really ruined their lives, it totally hasn't really ruined my life are, you know, sound churlish because, you know, I am as a result of not sort of fame, but as a result of what I do, of which fame is a part, able to write books and tell jokes and make documentaries for a living, which really is better than working for Amazon.

You know, it really is.

And so, anyone pretending, anyone who writes songs or whatever about how terrible life is in fame, about how you have to perform, I'm going to give you an example actually in the fame show.

When I talked about how in the fame show, I am not going to be talking about how like Janice Joplin, I do my show and then I go off lonely to my hotel room and I have to take lots of hair in.

I'm going to be talking about how I once got on a Ryanair flight and I deliberately booked only one priority seating thing.

And then I tried to keep the seats so that my family could get on quickly.

But a man saw me doing that and said, that's very tight.

And he didn't say that's very tight, he said, that's very tight, but deal.

And that is what my slightly annoying Monday level of fame is like, you can be spotted doing something like that.

But that's not a big deal.

I am pretty happy.

I tell you what I am, happy isn't quite the right word.

I am, in my opinion, incredibly comfortable in my own skin.

I kind of think I always have been, but I think as a result of that, all the destabilization that happens with fame, the most mistaken identity, and I've seen it happen to other people, it kind of couldn't happen to me.

Because I have nowhere else to go, except me.

No, I get depressed.

You get depressed.

Yeah, that's not because of fame.

No.

You've had that before.

That's why I didn't say I was happy, because I've had clinical depression and I know what it's like to be clinical depressed and I still feel it from time to time.

And why do you get depressed?

I think that...

Depresses never know the answer to that, Rory.

I don't really know the answer to it.

I do think, to come back to what we were about, that it will have a little bit to do with inherited trauma.

Because my grandfather was in and out of mental hospital.

My mother was definitely, you know, had lots of issues.

My dad as well, probably.

Yeah, my dad...

I don't know if my dad was depressed, but you know, I came from a difficult in a way background.

And I'm not really a glass half full person, I wouldn't say that.

But I am very happy with who I am, which is a different thing to being happy.

Shall we close with the thing we haven't mentioned, which is football's coming home and all that sort of said about our culture?

I mean, do you think it's going forever this sort of myth that England are going to win a major tournament and football coming home is going to be the anthem to it?

Well, the interesting thing about that as a question is that, of course, football's coming home with three lions is primarily a song about losing.

That's what it is.

The reason that it chimed such a large chord with England football fans is it was the first England song about the real experience, perhaps the real experience of all football fans, except if you're a Manchester City fan now.

Which is that most of the time you lose.

And what you do is you go to football magically thinking, well, maybe this time we're going to win, even though most of the time we don't.

Certainly as an England fan.

Certainly as a Burnley fan.

Certainly as a Burnley fan.

Yeah.

So...

About to get promoted.

I'll just put that on the record.

Yeah.

Got to the quarterfinal of the Cups, played Man City, played them off the field just that they beat us.

Good.

Yeah.

Good.

I mean, I think one of the things that's good is that, you know, you come from a football fandom that isn't just about winning everything, and most people, that's most people's experience, right?

But it's sort of England's experience.

I mean, England's experience is maybe more about, like, really thinking we're going to do well.

And that's partly to do with the songs, because the songs were all this time more than any other time.

Yeah.

You know, they were all about winning.

Did you sing when you wrote it?

And we weren't winning.

And then what happened was we wrote Three Lions, and people now talk about it, as you say, it's like, oh, football's coming home as if it's a song of triumphalism.

It's not.

Yeah.

It's a vulnerable song about thinking we're going to lose.

Did you think when you wrote it that it would become the sort of phenomenon that it has?

I mean, no.

It's a bit crazy.

That's the case with everything.

But I mean, to be fair about me, I only write things that I feel quite deeply.

I've never really written anything or done anything that does engage me in a very deep level.

And when me and Frank were asked by Ian Brody to provide the lyrics to that song, we sat around and talked for a bit.

And what we said was, let's try and write a song about what it's really like being an England fan.

I don't know, but, and I have told this story about, hey, on the day of England, Scotland at Euro 96, after the song had already come out and done quite well, got to number one, all very excited.

But we thought that its time had come when gone, and England weren't playing very well in that tournament.

They had lost or drawn to Switzerland in the first round, first game.

And then they fell to Scotland.

They weren't playing very well in the second half.

In the second half, Gary MacArthur missed the penalty, Seaman pumped them all upfield, has a score, one of the greatest goals ever scored, the sun came out, and a man who I

really owe an enormous debt to, and I don't know the name of, the DJ at Wembley, put three lines on as they came off the pitch.

And here's the thing, the whole crowd, apart from the Scottish feds, started singing the song at a point in time where there was no lyrics on screens.

We didn't know everyone had taken the song to their heart.

We had no idea, me and Frank, the like 80,000 people just start singing every line, not just the chorus, every line of the song.

And people say the best day of your life is when your children were born, sod that.

Well, David, thank you for being with us.

My pleasure.

It's been a real laugh.

So, Rory, what do you think, David Beal?

Well, I think...

By the way, you should have read his book.

You should have read *The Jews Don't Canberra*.

I send that to you.

You did, you did.

Come on, do some bloody research, man.

Do some hard work before I go.

And that's right.

It's good that you're plugging his book, though.

He did pretty well plugging his book, but not as well as Seaman.

I count as Seaman.

I count as Seaman.

You should just add an eighth book plug in there, too, I mean.

I think he's extraordinary.

I mean, he's obviously, he's got a very interesting quirky, yeah, quirky mind.

He's good at being tough and taking it back to the interviewer.

We haven't done an interview with somebody who's interrupted us as much, argued back as much, speaks very quickly, doesn't he?

No, he's very good.

He's actually got that sort of tactic the law of politicians use is that they spot when the next question's coming, but they just sort of, you know, steamroller through it.

But I do think, I mean, honestly, you should read *Jews Don't Count*.

It's a very, very interesting, clever book.

And I think he does have an interesting take.

And it's quite interesting that he's now writing about God from this atheist perspective.

I don't know if I'll buy the kind of people believing God because they believe in a superhero.

No, I don't.

And I think that is the thing that if I'd had more time, he says he's very comfortable on his skin, but he's also very, very confident in his views.

And I think this idea that the reason why people believe in God is that they're afraid is a lack of imagination, that there are many, many varieties of religious experience, there are many varieties of religious belief.

And I think that's a slightly, if I was going to confront him, a slightly patronizing atheist view of the situation.

The other thing we didn't really talk about, but I've talked to him before about is that he's a terrible insomniac, sleeps very, very little.

He says he never, ever has a good night's sleep.

And I think it's hard to say you're comfortable in your skin if you're not sleeping.

There's got to be stuff going on there that's keeping you awake.

And as you said, he's depressive, right?

Yeah.

I mean, I don't know if he takes medication now, but I know he has done in the past.

No, I think he's got a very, very interesting mind.

And also he's gone through these sort of various stages of his career.

I don't know why he cares so much about how people perceive him, you know, that whether they see him as the football lad with Frank Skinner or the intellectual who's writing interesting books.

Or I think if you're comfortable in your skin, you don't really care about what anybody's really thinking.

I think he's moving to that.

But I'm not sure he's really there yet.

I reckon he'll find God in the end.

Yeah, there we are.

It's a good, good privilege.

I know I really enjoyed it.

Thank you for setting that up.

And I thank you for the conversation.

See you soon.

Bye.