

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / Peter Thiel Says America Has Bigger Problems Than Wokeness

I'm Barry Weiss, and this is Honestly.

Hello.

Hi.

Hello.

This is Candice, my producer.

Hi.

Nice to meet you.

A few weeks ago, my producer Candice and I went to Miami to talk to the tech entrepreneur and investor Peter Thiel at his home.

Peter Thiel is one of the most formative men in modern Silicon Valley.

He's also one of the most despised people among the New York media set, having successfully conspired to put the publication Gawker out of business.

So depending on your view of the world, or your politics, or perhaps what coast you live on, you might think Peter Thiel is a hero, or a villain, or maybe you haven't yet heard of him at all.

Thiel was one of the founders of the online payment system PayPal, and his cohort of co-founders, known as the PayPal mafia, included people like Elon Musk, David Sacks, and Max Levchin.

Thiel was called the Don.

He was also the first outside investor to Facebook, and his investments in companies like LinkedIn, Palantir, and SpaceX have made him a billionaire many times over.

But unlike a lot of wealthy, powerful people who often say the popular thing in public and the thing they actually believe in private, Thiel has used his voice and his fortune to steer the culture and the country in the direction he believes it, despite sometimes unbelievable blowback.

In 2016, that meant breaking rinks with almost the entire Silicon Valley set by throwing his weight behind Donald Trump, who he believed could shake up a stagnant Washington, and therefore a stagnant America.

Good evening, I'm Peter Thiel.

It's hard to remember this, but our government was once high-tech too.

This research was laying the foundations for the Internet.

The Apollo program was just about to put a man on the moon.

The future felt limitless.

But today, our government is broken.

Our nuclear bases still use floppy disks.

Instead of going to Mars, we have invaded the Middle East.

On this most important issue, Donald Trump is right.

It's time to end the era of stupid wars and rebuild our country.

The decision to support Trump and in such a public way was seen by even some of his fans as a bridge too far, but Thiel has always been comfortable being a contrarian.

Indeed, beyond supporting Trump's presidency, in last year's midterms, Thiel was a huge backer of two anti-establishment Republican candidates, Blake Masters in Arizona who lost, and JD Vance in Ohio who won.

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But in our conversation today, Thiel says he's changing course.

When I asked him who he'd back in 2024, he refused to answer the question.

He says he's backing away from supporting politicians and is urging the political right to shift their focus from the culture wars to things that he believes matter more, like economic growth and tech innovation.

We cover a lot in this conversation.

Thiel's love of progress and his conservative politics and whether there's tension between the two.

We talk about why he believes that Democrats are the evil party and Republicans are the stupid party.

We talk about why American infrastructure has fallen so far behind other nations and why we're so impressed with the apps on our phones instead of dreaming of new moonshots.

We also talk about AI, China, TikTok, Twitter, and the right way to defeat what Elon Musk calls the woke mind virus.

What is the man who's won on all of these big bets, from Facebook to Trump, make of those bets now?

And what are the bets he's making in the decades ahead?

Stay with us.

Hi honestly listeners, I'm here to tell you about an alternative investing platform called Masterworks.

I know investing in finance can be overwhelming, especially given our economic climate, but there's one thing that will never go in the red, and that is a painting from Picasso's blue period.

Masterworks is an exclusive community that invests in blue chip art.

They buy a piece of art and then they file that work with the SEC.

It's almost like filing for an IPO.

You buy a share representing an investment in the art.

Then Masterworks holds the piece for three to ten years and then when they sell it, you get a prorated portion of the profit's minus fees.

Masterworks has sold \$45 million worth of art to date from artists like Andy Warhol, Banksy and Monet.

Over 700,000 investors are using Masterworks to get in on the art market.

So go to [masterworks.com slash honestly](https://masterworks.com/slash/honestly) for priority access.

That's [masterworks.com slash honestly](https://masterworks.com/slash/honestly).

You can also find important regulation A disclosures at [masterworks.com slash cd](https://masterworks.com/slash/cd).

Peter Thiel, welcome to honestly.

Thanks for having me.

Peter, you've been called the pariah of Silicon Valley.

You've been called mysterious, a provocateur.

The New Yorker called you opaque, enigmatic and irracular and secretly the most important person in Silicon Valley.

And perhaps most often you're simply described as a contrarian.

There was a book by that name that came out about you a few years ago.

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When I hear that word, I think of someone who's sort of intentionally at odds with conventional wisdom.

Do you think that's true of you and of your worldview?

Well, it's, man, some of these things are flattering, but they're mostly I think caricatures.

I try to think for myself.

I don't like the contrarian label because that just means putting a minus sign in front of the conventional wisdom, which surely isn't that different.

As an investor, there is probably some value in being contrarian.

You want to invest in things that aren't popular, but it's at least equally important to be right.

And I think something like that is true of so many other things.

So it's when you're contrarian and right, you're onto something important, something that's not being discussed, but there's no great virtue in being contrarian wrong.

Have you been sort of at odds with the prevailing culture around you for a very long time?

I think about your college years and starting the Stanford review.

It's pretty unusual to be a conservative on a college campus.

Was that sort of an early experience for you?

How do you think about that time?

Yes, although I wasn't thinking of myself as a rebel without a cause or anything like that.

I was interested in big picture questions of how all these different things integrated.

That's probably why I majored in philosophy as an undergraduate.

And that's what I've always pushed on.

When we started the Stanford review, probably the signature issue in the late 1980s was the core curriculum around the Western Civ class, the required freshman class at Stanford. And there was a Jesse Jackson rally at Stanford, hey, hey, ho, ho, Western culture's got to go.

And it was in some sense, it was a narrow debate about this particular class.

And then it was a much broader debate about sort of our whole culture had to go.

And this sort of the simultaneously parochial and patricidal approach to our culture.

And so it was in some sense, almost a topic too big for us to deal with.

And there was all sorts of debates that triggered and escalated that when we didn't know what we were getting ourselves into.

But some people find themselves drawn into the arena, drawn into the fray because they naturally thrive on conflict.

And some people feel compelled to do it because they feel it's the right thing, even though it's not their natural proclivity.

Which one are you?

I think I have a very schizophrenic view on this.

I think that politics are simultaneously very important because it just permeates the air that we breathe and they're extremely toxic.

And so I end up with this schizophrenic view where I will get involved very intensely at times and then at other times, I just try to, you know, mind my own business.

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Okay, well, let's talk about politics then.

It's a perfect transition.

I think the first time that many people outside the world of tech and Silicon Valley learned your name was in 2016, in July of that year, when you stepped on stage at the Republican National Convention to endorse Donald Trump, and you said this.

Now we are told that the great debate is about who gets to use which bathroom.

This is a distraction from our real problems.

Of course, every American has a unique identity.

I am proud to be gay.

I am proud to be a Republican, but most of all, I am proud to be an American.

What brought you to that stage and to that moment?

It was a whole, well, on a very narrow level, it was sort of a concatenation of random things with like 10 days before that, Don Jr. had asked me to speak, and we thought this would be kind of a cool thing to do, and two months before that, I had volunteered to be a Republican delegate from San Francisco where you just needed to sign up.

There were three Republican delegates, and you could just get one of the slots since nobody wanted to have them, and I thought it would be cool to go to the convention.

But the bigger context was that I had a sense that the country was in stagnation, maybe not outright decline for a long time, that we were not progressing as a society, we were not even progressing in the area that's seen as quintessentially progressive, namely technology, information technology in particular, and there was a hope that there was something about the Trump campaign, the Trump presidency that was a scream for help that was going to enable us to have a debate about the stagnation and how to move beyond that.

I always like to say that Trump's slogan, make America great again, was in some sense the most triggering thing possible in Silicon Valley.

It didn't trigger people at Goldman Sachs because they don't think they're making America great, but the tech...

What do they think they're doing?

They think they're making money, and they have a slightly bad conscience about it.

But when the financial crisis hit in 2008, they knew they had done a bunch of bad things, and they lobbied to get Dodd-Frank passed in a way that wouldn't be too bad for the banks.

But the people that go to the Bay Area to build things, they imagine they're changing the world.

They imagine they're changing the world.

They think there are utopian stories, there are extremely moralistic stories they tell themselves, and then there are all these ways that I would argue it has fallen far short of that.

In some ways, they don't deserve all the blame for the stagnation because if Silicon Valley isn't building flying cars, they're also not being built anywhere else.

It's unfair to put all the blame on Silicon Valley, but there is something about the narrative in Silicon Valley that I think is very disconnected from the reality, and of course, there's a California version of this where in one sense, you've had this sort of gold rush boom on the internet for the last quarter century in the context of a state where so many of the institutions, the physical infrastructure, are just disintegrating, and so it's very

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discordant even on the level of the city of San Francisco or you go to the East Bay and things are in much less good shape than they are on the peninsula, so there are all these ways that it's very myopic.

The fact that you endorse Trump and that you took to the stage in that way triggered a lot of people in your world.

People demanded that Facebook drop you from its board, that the incubator-wide combinators sever ties with you.

Netflix CEO Reed Hastings, who you had served on the Facebook board with, called your decision to support Trump catastrophically bad judgment.

Was it?

Did you see something others didn't?

I certainly thought it was one of the least contrarian things I ever did.

Really?

Sure, it's like half the country is supposed to be vote for one person, half the country roughly supposed to vote for the other person, so if you're doing something that half the country is doing, it shouldn't be that controversial, and that was something I was certainly very wrong about.

On some level, the election was a debate about us not really being able to touch certain rails, a narrowing of the Overton window and things like that.

I think it was triggering in the summer and fall of 2016 in certain ways, but I also underestimated how triggering it would be if Trump actually won, which I sincerely thought he had a good chance of winning.

He had a 50-50 chance of winning all the way through 2016 just because the political correctness was stopping people from even telling what they thought to the pollsters or answering the polls.

I thought there were all these ways that the sentiment wasn't quite being captured, and I also thought I'd be in more trouble if Trump won, but strangely enough, I wasn't able to connect those two basic thoughts.

Why did you think you would be in more trouble if Trump won?

Because it was just like a super eccentric thing to support Trump if he lost badly.

If he won, it would be seen as a much more dangerous thing, but these were all half-formed thoughts in the summer fall of 2016.

I remember the reaction to it that night being incredibly intense.

Did you lose friends because of your decision to endorse him?

I don't think I lost close friends.

I'm not on Twitter.

There's all these contexts where people get to be angry at you and say things that they later regret.

I didn't have that many interactions like that, but yeah, there were probably some part of the Silicon Valley gang that didn't want to talk to me anymore.

Looking back at the promise that Trump offered people, making America great again, did you do it?

My expectations were never that high because I think the problems in our country are deep

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and they're hard to change.

In some ways, he did the first step of talking about them.

It was a scream for help, much like Brexit in the UK was a scream for help against a more and more dysfunctional European Union.

Then it's going to be a long, long process.

So ask me that question in 10 years.

You've said that Democrats are the evil party and Republicans are the stupid party.

I don't think that's original to me, but I agree with it.

I agree with it.

Why are Democrats evil or rather, why is the Democratic Party the evil party?

I don't think you believe Democrats are evil or maybe you do.

It is the party that controls these center-left institutions and they are, from my point of view, centralizing things too much.

It's led to the sort of, it's not quite socialist, but it keeps pushing our society in a more homogenized, group-think, stagnationist direction and they should know better.

Then I think the Republicans are this often rather weak resistance to that.

Do you think they're still weak?

I think they've probably been relatively weak for 100 years.

After the last time, one could have said that the institutions genuinely tilted Republican was maybe the 1920s and yes, there were things that went wrong in the Great Depression, but yeah, I think if you look at the media, the universities, the big cities, the culture-forming institutions, the sense-making things, those have tilted center-left or further-left for close to 100 years now.

One of the other things you said in that RNC speech and I went back and read it was this, Great culture wars only distract us from our economic decline and nobody in this race is being honest about it except Donald Trump.

Seven years after the fact, it seems to me that the culture wars have not just gotten worse arguably because of Trump or you could say he's a reaction to it, he's a catalyst of it, we can have that debate, but it actually seems to me that the culture wars matter a great deal to people.

We're sitting here in Miami.

The governor of this state has described it as the place where woke goes to die.

He's basically making his name at least nationally on fighting things like critical race theory in the culture war.

Do you still think the culture wars are a great distraction?

Are you defining culture war in a more narrow way?

Well, things can be both important and a distraction at the same time and in part that comment that I made at the RNC speech in 2016 was a self-reflection on what I had done in the 1980s and 1990s where I was involved in these, maybe not culture wars, but these campus wars where a great number of these debates were prefigured in the university's critical race theory.

It was something I learned about at Stanford Law School in the early 1990s and I wrote a book with my friend David Sacks on this published in 1995 entitled The Diversity Method.

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I think it's still a good title.

You don't have real diversity when you have a group of people who look different and think alike.

Diversity is more than just hiring the extras from the space cantina scene in Star Wars.

There were all these arguments that we made 25 plus years ago that I think were in some sense correct.

They've stood up incredibly well over time and then at the same time, they're all these things I worry that they missed.

The focus on identity politics on the woke religion is probably a distraction from stagnation. It's a distraction from economics.

It's a distraction from the way in which the younger generation in the US is probably going to have a hard time having as a good standard of living as their parents.

There's a set of issues we do not want to talk about.

I think DeSantis would make a terrific president if he's the Republican nominee.

I will strongly support him in 2024, but I do worry that focusing on the woke issue as ground zero is not quite enough just to give a very different kind of a metric.

We've thought some about moving our offices from California to Florida, and it's a tough thing to do at this point because the real estate prices in Florida have doubled and the interest rates have doubled.

If you buy a house in Miami today versus just three years ago, you're paying four times as much in a monthly mortgage payment, and that kind of an economic cost is probably not enough to offset all the wokeness in the world or even the taxes.

It's a really hard problem to solve.

What do you do about these runaway rents, these runaway housing costs?

It's a super hard problem to solve.

I have no idea how to solve that.

I understand why DeSantis doesn't talk about that, but it surely is a bigger problem.

When Elon Musk said recently, basically, if we don't defeat the woke mind virus, it's game over.

Do you believe that?

I can believe that, but there's always this philosophy distinction between things that are necessary and sufficient.

To take our civilization to the next level, let's frame this more positively for us to go back to a society that's progressing in many ways from generation to generation, many real ways.

I think it's necessary to defeat the woke mind virus.

I don't think it's sufficient.

I think even if you defeat it, you will still have this economic stagnation, this runaway debt problem.

Even if people take more serious subjects in college, you still have a runaway student debt problem.

It's not just these fringe subjects that are bad.

Most of the college education probably does not have a good ROI.

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Last year, Peter, you stepped down from the board of Metta, which is the parent company of Facebook.

This made a lot of headlines.

You were Facebook's first outside investor famously.

You're in the social network, one of my favorite movies.

You're its longest serving board member.

You were a close advisor to Mark Zuckerberg.

A lot of conservatives I know, even libertarians, were very distressed when you made that decision.

They felt like you were the last man standing, that you played a very important role in advising Zuckerberg and Facebook not to police political ads in the run up to the 2020 election.

Why did you step down?

Well, I think I'd spent, I've been on the board for 17 years, which is an extremely long board term.

These things always get exaggerated.

How much of a difference individual board members can make, even when you've been in one of these places for so long.

The thing that mattered far more was the day-to-day management of the company, the executive team.

On a board, you have one meeting a quarter where you can provide some input on a very high level, but then the very difficult challenges that Facebook and Metta had were how to implement

all these things.

How did you restrict hate speech?

How do you try to stay consistent with the First Amendment broadly?

These were extremely difficult challenges.

I think there were a lot of mistakes that the company made.

I think there are ways the conservatives are too harsh, too critical on it as well, but it was a very difficult situation.

The way that it was reported in the press and definitely the way that it's solidified in my mind was Peter Thiel is stepping off the Facebook board so he can get more involved in politics.

This was around the time that you threw your weight, I think \$10 million behind Blake Masters in Arizona who lost, and then behind JD Vance, Senate candidate in Ohio who won.

Was there a connection between the two things?

I think it was one of those stories the media liked to write, and it's always this question whether you go out of your way to try to quash these stories.

My bias is not to do it, but it was a weak connection.

Masters and Vance, let's talk about them.

They're people that sort of exemplify the new right, a bit more protectionist, skeptical of immigration, ferociously critical of big tech, and also ferociously critical of China.

I want to ask you about both of those last two subjects, big tech and China and how they fit together.

Peter, you helped start PayPal, which had the mission of providing everyone everywhere

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with the opportunity to participate fully in the global economy.

Last fall, PayPal introduced a \$2,500 fine for users that were, quote, promoting misinformation or spreading material that, quote, may risk user safety and well-being.

You were also the first outside investor in Facebook you spent, as we just talked about, 17 years on the board, and Facebook during COVID banned users that suggested that COVID came from a lab, and this is to say nothing of the platform's decision to kick off Trump.

And your investment fund, Founder's Fund, was an early investor in Airbnb.

Airbnb, as you may know, just banned the parents of a Canadian conservative activist named Lauren Southern simply because they are related to her.

These moves that these companies have made, companies that you've either invested in or helped start, are kind of the antithesis, I think, of what you believe in.

I'm extremely interested in the question of how institutions become captured, how they become transformed, and I'm curious if you can speak to what happened inside these companies and if you see a connection between them.

Well, for starters, I don't want to excuse any of those things.

You'd have to go through all these things in some detail.

I think it was a mistake on Facebook's part to push back on the lab leak theory, which not only was an alternate theory that should have been discussed, but now looks like it was the true theory.

So we should be allowed to discuss lots of things that are untrue, and then it's really shocking when there's something important and true that we were not allowed to discuss.

It is, of course, it was in a context where we had all kinds of crazy pressures from government health officials, their top-down regulatory pressures, their bottom-up employee pressures.

So there was this mass insanity in the response to COVID, and I don't think Facebook was unusually bad in the math.

It was affected by the mass insanity like everybody else.

No, it was other feasts with everyone else.

You know, I think if I were to give a more nuanced version,

the bigger mistake on the Facebook side was not to correct this for a long time.

It took, I think, I may be wrong, but it took over a year till that actually got corrected.

You know, I think the PayPal issue strike me as more serious, because if you downrank someone's speech, that's sort of on one particular platform like Facebook, that's one kind of thing.

If you cut off their access to the financial system, that's starting to sound like something that you expect in communist China with, you know, a social credit score where you actually cut off people's economic livelihoods.

That strikes me as a very, very different sort of thing.

I don't know about the Airbnb example, and that one probably, like so many of these examples, it's always hard to know.

Was it intentional?

Was it an intentional?

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Was it a mistake?

Was it some rogue employee?

Was it somehow encouraged on a top-down level by the management?

But yes, I think Big Tech has not acquitted itself terribly well,

and it's been too much in this sort of status direction.

There's always a question of what drives it.

I think it's probably somewhat unfair to put too much of the blame on the CEOs and the top executives, and then I think the second group is always the bottom-up woke employees.

That's certainly a factor.

But I also think there is sort of a top-down governmental piece that's always understated.

If you're a PayPal, you're a highly regulated institution, you're linked with our financial system in all these ways, and the regulators, deep states, probably not quite the right word, but the administrative state broadly understood has these very center-left sensibilities.

There are a lot of gray zones.

So I think the understated factor is that a lot of this is the sort of top-down, center-left regulatory issue.

There's probably the bigness of the companies means that there's a lot of surface area where they get regulated and where this is a bigger factor.

There's always the Noam Chomsky of the communist professor at MIT, I like to quote, who says, the Republicans are the party of business, the Democrats discriminate, they're the party of big business because big businesses will do a better job of implementing this center-left worldview, whereas small businesses are too hard to monitor and control.

And then look, just to answer your other thread of your question,

I think that the big tech companies are still a lot better than the communist Chinese alternatives.

And so we should be probably at least as focused on the problem that is TikTok than on the problems that exist at Google or Facebook, which I think are whatever things they've done wrong are on a much smaller scale and much less deranging to our society than TikTok, which we should be thinking of as like an AI weapon from communist China.

Yes?

Why isn't it been banned yet?

I think that's, I think why questions are all, any question that starts the word why is always over determined. There are probably a lot of different reasons, but probably one of them is that it's still very hard for us to even talk about the problem of communist China without sounding racist. This is what always happens, right? So if we call it China, that sounds racist.

If you call it the CCP, that sounds like it's just a party like the Democrats or the Republicans.

And so we don't have the right language to describe it.

I want to get to China in a minute. Let's stay on tech for a few more questions.

I think a lot of conservatives look at that list of things that I gave you, PayPal, Airbnb, Facebook, the reporting that we discovered at Twitter of deranking people like Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, et cetera, et cetera. And they say, you're right, Peter, it's not communist China.

It's not state down, but we basically have something like a privatized social credit system.

Do you think that that's hyperbole?

Well, it's slight hyperbole, but if we don't worry about it more, it'll become

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more and more that way, and it will keep going that way. But just to correct with it, I think it is partially top down. It is because the big companies are super entangled with these regulators. Airbnb, it's a somewhat controversial business that touches a lot of local zoning regulations in cities. It's mainly in cities. The cities are very corrupt. They're not even center left. They're far left rackets at this point, and that's where the top down pressure comes on Airbnb. I'd like them to resist it more, but I understand where they're coming from. There's a paradox about your worldview that interests me. You're a self-described libertarian, and yet you also say you don't believe in competition. You've given talks titled, Competition is for Losers. In your book, Zero to One, you say that there are only two types of businesses, businesses that are perfectly competitive and monopolies, and obviously, monopoly is better. Explain that to me. Well, in my Zero to One book that I wrote in 2014 on startups, business generally, the core thesis was that people normally think that capitalism and competition are synonyms, and they're often actually opposites because capitalism is about the accumulation of capital. If you have a hyper-competitive business, you're not going to ever make that much money. If you want to be in Darwinian nature-beared red-and-tooth-and-claw competition, you should open a restaurant. There are ways that maybe it's good for society to have hyper-competition, but a libertarian perspective, I would say, is more the perspective of the individual or the founders starting the business. From the internal perspective, you want to pick something where you do something that's very different. It's a different product. It's not a form of runaway competition like that. That's the business advice that I would still give to anybody starting a business. I think the large tech companies, if they are monopolies, they are for the most part what are called natural monopolies, where they just have these incredible economies of scale. Actually, if you figured out a way to break Google up into five different search engines, it would actually cost a lot more to do that. It would be actually a much less efficient system. The rough econ intuition is that software has a very low marginal cost, and therefore, you get these incredible economies of scale. When you have a natural monopoly, you don't want to break it up. The typical answer is you want to regulate it in some ways, which is again, not a libertarian perspective, but that's I think the economic reality of these businesses. The realm of nation-states is different. We need to compete with China. Obviously, I had a point where you start to distort the political discussion, the cultural discussion. That's something where we get into a zone that's very non-economic. Do you think that that's what's happening at a company like Twitter, under the previous regime at Twitter? There are elements of that, but it also always depends on how you define the market. If you define the market of Twitter as short packet information content, Twitter had close to monopoly on that. If you define it as media broadly, it obviously widened the discourse. Even when people get shadow banned, deep platformed, even when all the sort of crazy things that happened on Twitter happened, it probably was still better than, let's say, the New York Times or the mainstream media or things like this. I think the internet in 2016 was far more free, had a far broader range of discussion than, let's say, the media landscape in the US circa 2000, the old media landscape circa 2000. I think there were ways that things regressed over the last six, seven years, but we're still in a better space. It's all these different questions. How you define the market and then what the alternatives are. But yes,

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I think there is a point where the big tech companies can be so big that you start tangling with these things in a political way. That's a very tricky issue. I don't know, even in that case, whether they should be regulated more. The nuclear weapon against the big tech companies, against a company like Google, is antitrust. I don't know if that helps our side because—Who's our side?

Let's say conservatives, libertarians, the center right, because the fantasy is that you bring an antitrust case against Google and you'll break them up after years of litigation, and then you'll have five separate companies, which again may, in a competitive market, just consolidate into one, or one might beat all of them because of the natural monopoly effect I gave, but that's probably not what happens. What probably happens is before you get to a trial or anything like this, you get a government settlement with Google, and if you have something like the Biden administration settling it with Google, it'll be, we won't break you up as long as you ban even more hate speech than before. On the one hand, there are some very real challenges

with big tech, and then on the other hand, we need to think very hard about what kinds of regulations are likely to even be helpful versus where's the cure worse than the disease.

If you're trying to start a company, better to choose an open lane than to choose a restaurant, but in the realm of national security and nation states, you don't have that luxury.

We need to compete with China. How do you rate how the U.S. is doing vis-a-vis its competition with China? There are a lot of ways that we're not doing terribly well. You have to, of course, also start even by defining the competition and the tricky thing with China. It's quite different from the competition with the Soviet Union, which was in some ways ideological and military, and China, you certainly have all these military dimensions, some of them involving all these new technologies where we don't even know how they will work, space-based weapons, cyber weapons, hypersonic missiles, and then, of course, you have this broad internet competition, let's say TikTok versus the U.S. tech companies. You have a whole range of economic competition involving this sort of export-oriented manufacturing model in China, which creates all sorts of cheap consumer goods in the U.S., but also hollows out much of our economy. It is this very multi-dimensional set of dynamics that we tend to be quite bad at thinking about.

I think there are a lot of strange problems China also has. It is very uncharismatic.

Even if it's somehow on the side of the future, it's an extremely dystopian future.

They have a housing bubble. There are all sorts of ways that it's far from inevitable that China is going to take over the world. I always think one should frame these things as more closely matched. If we're too optimistic, if you're too optimistic, you just say, we're going to beat China, it's going to just collapse. That's, I think, a form of denial. If you're too pessimistic, it's China, they're willing to work for a dollar an hour in an iPhone factory. We can never compete with people working 12 hours a day, six days a week, and we should just accept that they're going to beat us. I think both acceptance and denial are forms where you're not in between. The in-between

mode is to say, it's a roughly even competition and we need to fight. I think that's the perspective I would have. Of course, it's not simply a China versus the U.S. thing. If you said it was just China versus the U.S., you get to all these ways that it seems like China will eventually win. The U.S. has 350 million people, China has 1.4 billion, so it has four times the population of

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the U.S. If China just catches up to the U.S., it just copies our economy and you get to, let's say not even parity, but let's say one-half the per capita GDP of the U.S., you'll have an economy that's twice as big and then you can have twice the military and in all these ways, just the scale of China suggests it will win versus the U.S.

But I think the dynamic is that in some ways it's likely to become China against the whole world. This is where I think the Trump administration was right to start with a more unilateral approach of doing things to China. Over time, we have to also get our allies to work with us. This is where Western Europe, Japan, even India are all much more aligned with the U.S. in finding ways to contain China than they were a decade ago. I think if you frame it as China versus the U.S., that's a frame where our side, the U.S. is likely to lose. If you frame it as China versus the world, and China has 1.4 billion people, the rest of the world has over 5 billion.

That seems hard. By 2100 with the demographics in China, China will have 700 million people. The rest of the world will have 10 billion. So it's China versus the world. That looks very, very bad. There is something about, this may be too polemical to frame this, but I think of China under G as a nationalistic country. It is a socialist country. It's an extremely racist country. There are things about that that can be powerful, but they are not going to be charismatic for the rest of the world ever. I am just consistently scandalized by how weak our country is vis-a-vis China. I see Wall Street. I see Silicon Valley. I see our universities. I see the commissioner of the NBA being asked extraordinarily basic questions about, say, human rights in China, and being absolutely paralyzed and unable to answer them because of business interests. It's pathetic. I agree with you. It's very pathetic.

Explain it to me. Look, it is.

It's like, I sometimes see it, and I'm like, are we already sort of an economic vassal state of China? Look, we are still a flip this around. We're still more of a free and open society, and we don't have this one-party, one-state fusion.

But, Peter, that's a really low bar. That's not-

No, but we're not China. China is, I know, it's kind of a fascist country. It's basically, you have this one-party fused with the economy, and it's all in sync. There are things about that that are strong. There are things about our side that are discombobulated, but in some ways, it comes

with a more free society. Look, I think there are fewer parts of the U.S. that are still getting any benefit from China. There certainly still are parts of Wall Street, parts of Hollywood, and the universities. Those are the three sectors.

Well, anyone who goes to Costco and Walmart and gets a refrigerator, I mean, couldn't you argue that the entire, like, there's a codependent relationship where we are addicted to cheap stuff, and until we break our addiction to that, this is going to sort of continue and continue and continue. Yeah, look, I think you're right about Walmart.

Most of our economy doesn't actually involve imports. It involves non-tradable service sector jobs. And so, yes, I agree that there are all these different pieces that have been co-opted, and probably on the Republican Party, the Iowa farmers have been co-opted, and so it's hard for presidential candidates to campaign the Iowa caucuses because the farmers in Iowa are trying to make sure to buy more stuff from the Iowa farmers than from other parts of the country. And so there are all these different pieces that are partially co-opted. In aggregate,

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I think it's just not enough, and China is, it's a zero-sum place. I think it's not enough in the UK, in France. I think Germany probably still has a little bit more of this appeasement mindset of various corporate interests picking up pennies in front of the bulldozer. But I think it has shifted some in the US. I would like it to shift faster. In some ways, you'd like us to be more cohesive, but we're not a fascist country. And that's a good thing. Yeah, but you would think that there would be more of a unified response to this adversary than there is. You like it to be faster. I think it is strongly trending in that direction. And look, I think it's complicated. But I think it's also, it's one of the few things the two parties broadly agree on. And of course, there are all these ways that different parts of both parties have been co-opted, and it's going to be slow to really disentangle it. It is like the word that I've thought we should use for describing what's screwed up about the relationship with China. We shouldn't be using appeasement or detente because that focuses on the 1930s, 1970s analogies where it was too much the sort of narrowly military dimension. And the positive word people always use is that we are interdependent, and we should replace that and say we are co-dependent. And we have a co-dependent relationship with China. It's like the Nord Stream pipeline between Germany and Russia. There was a

co-dependency that was unhealthy, and we have 100 pipelines between the US and China. It shouldn't dominate our economy. It doesn't actually dominate our economy as much as it does. It's surprising how much people have been willing to pander to China for how little. I mean, the Hollywood people don't make that much money from the movies in China. And I think the last year you had Hollywood movies in which the Chinese communists were villains were 1997, seven years in Tibet was 1997. And so, yeah, I find it disturbing that people are co-opted for so little. But I think even in Hollywood, even on Wall Street, people have gotten the memo that it's a kind of a co-dependent relationship. Co-dependent relationships eventually end, and you're best off not having endless therapy. You're best off just ending it on our terms, not theirs. So your investment firm Founders Fund used to begin its online manifesto with a quote that's become really famous. It goes like this, we wanted flying cars, instead we got 140 characters. In other words, we were promised big things about the technological revolution. We were promised a cure for cancer. We were promised a man on Mars. And instead, we await the latest iPhone updates that promise us the ability to delete a text message sent on mistake. You had this great line in this interview with Mary Harrington and Unheard where you said, we tell ourselves we're advancing because grandma gets an iPhone with a smooth surface, but meanwhile, she gets to eat cat food because food prices have gone up. The conventional wisdom, Allah Steven Pinker, who makes this argument in his book Better Angels, is that we're living through a time not just of tremendous change, but of betterment, of progress, perhaps the most progress that any human beings have ever lived through. Make the case for me that that's wrong. Well, I'm trying to think where to even begin. I feel like-

Most people think of the 21st century, we're living through amazing progress. Tell me why we're not.

Well, you can define progress and there are all these different dimensions of progress we can debate. There's economic, is it per capita income? Is it moral progress? Do we have a better functioning government? The narrow dimension people like to focus on is technological progress because if there has been progress, that's the one area where it tends to have a one-way

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direction where you discover new things and technology and science, it does not get reversed. But I would say even if we think about how much technological progress is happening, how fast it is happening, I would argue it's a narrow cone of progress where the definition of technology itself has narrowed. If we were here in 1970, technology would have meant computers, but it also would have meant new medicines, it would have meant the Green Revolution in agriculture,

it would have meant rockets, supersonic aviation, and it was sort of multi-multidimensional.

In the last 50 years, we've had progress in the world of bits,

not in the world of atoms. We've had progress in computers, internet, mobile internet,

things like that. I was an undergraduate at Stanford in the late 1980s. In retrospect, almost every engineering field that you could have gone into would have been a bad field to go into. Mechanical engineering, chemical engineering, certainly nuclear engineering, aero-astro, these were catastrophic fields because the world of atoms got regulated and we stopped progressing.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission in the US has not approved a new nuclear reactor design in 50 years. That's an area where we're not progressing as a society.

The reason there's no progress in the world of Alzheimer, cancer, nuclear is because of regulation. Meantime, we have the Airbnbs and the Netflix because there's none.

The why questions are always over-determined. The libertarian answer, there's too much regulation.

There are arguments that the education systems are screwed up and the scientists aren't able to think as freely and independently as before. There are arguments that the low-hanging fruit's been picked and it's the easy discoveries that have been made. This is the Tyler Cohen argument.

There probably is some truth to a lot of different ones. There's something about neurobiology that's quite hard and then the FDA also has regulated things a great deal. It is a scandal that there's been zero progress on dementia in 40 or 50 years. It's both probably a very hard thing to progress on and then probably also tells us something about an overly risk-averse society where we should be doing more experiments because it's a real health emergency.

Then we get into these questions. How do you measure and how do you compare all these things?

How do you compare the lack of progress on nuclear reactor design with the progress on the smoothness of the iPhone or things like this and how do you sort of score it and add it all up?

That's where the qualitative things I get to are. There's a sense in which incomes have been relatively stagnant. There's this generational sense that things are not progressing and that's broadly where I think we have quite a problem. I think it is a topic I've been on for 15 or 16 years, this text stagnation one. I think there are ways that, I'm not sure this proves that I'm right, but I think that more people have come around to my side of it than were there in 2006 or 2007.

As I said, I think the thing I liked about the Trump MAGA slogan was not the New Age optimism, but it was the realistic pessimism that the US is not as great a country as it was in the past, which is, first off, if we're going to go back to being a society in which there's progress on many fronts, real progress, maybe we have to start by acknowledging that something's gone wrong and that things have really slowed down. I think pinker, I don't know, it's even the things pinker focused on, the decline in violence, the Better Angels book. I think that was written in 2010. He picked the 100 year low in violence. It was just before the Arab Spring started. Even if you look at the metric of how many human beings are being violently killed,

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even that's gotten worse in the last 13 years. It's not clear we're progressing towards more free societies. The Fukuyama End of History thesis is at least challenged by what's happened in China in the last decade. It's been a very strange 21st century. I think there was a lot that was fake about the 1990s, but that probably was the last decade that people genuinely believed that things were getting better. The dot-com bubble in 1999, it still felt broad. It felt like a lot of people were going to participate in it. It was in some ways very delusional. You did get some great companies and they did increase productivity in certain ways, but it didn't take our civilization to the next level. This is always my riff on Twitter. The pre-e-law on Twitter had 8,000 employees and it was a great business in that they had cushy jobs and they could smoke marijuana all day. It was fine on that level, but from a macro economic perspective, it was not going to lead to all this GDP growth in the United States or anything like that. It's unfair to blame Twitter, unfair to blame any single company, but the aggregates just are not what they appear to be. The ad hominem argument I always attempted to make with people like Pinker is that it's just this baby boomer mentality where I don't think things even worked that well for the boomers, but that was the last generation where things broadly worked better for them than for the generation that came before. They can't actually see the truth about the world as it is for millennials, Gen Zers, etc. I'm also tempted to say that they were in control of a lot of the institutions in our society when things went wrong. This whole debate about stagnation, it's probably unfair to just blame the boomers, but something went very, very wrong with that generation. You end up with some,

it's almost a personal ad hominem argument against Steve Pinker because I think of him as a quintessential boomer. That's the argument I'm tempted to make and I suspect that's a big dimension of this as well. Just another question about progress. Tell me how the rise of wokeness is actually a reflection of the lack of real progress we're making as a society?

Well, this was even a Marxist critique of all the identity politics already in the 1970s, if we focused on racism or feminism or all these different sub-identities, you were dividing the workers and they weren't focused on what their incomes were doing on class or things like this. There's a Marxist version where the woke religion is a distraction from class. Everything that distracts from economics is somehow, in a Marxist theory, is a reactionary record- I'm totally compelled by that Marxist argument. Of course, there's also a libertarian argument where the libertarian perspective also probably puts too much stress on economics and not as much on these other things. I think that it's gone in these different waves, but the first wave of the identity politics, I think, really did start in the 1970s in the form of racial quotas, affirmed of action. It coincided with the society where there was less growth and things were more zero-sum. It was a question of how do you allocate the various slots in our society versus increasing the size of the pie? Look, there are elements of it that are correct. There are even elements of the woke religion that are correct. There were all kinds of historical injustices. There were all sorts of people who were victimized. It's always a bit of a trap for those of us on the right to say that the history was wonderful and wasn't that terrible. I think the history was really quite bad. It's always unclear what you do about it. The woke thing would not have gotten to where it is if it didn't have certain elements of truth about it, but I think it's still mostly a magic trick. It's an attention redirection where we're just not paying attention to the more

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important things. I want to talk about the way you think about change, because here's how I see the present moment. Most people that are paying attention agree that things are broken, that they're not

working the way that they should. It seems to me that there are two reactions to this. One is the attitude of the reformers who basically say, you're right, things are broken, but we can fix them, and we can fix them by tinkering at the margins. We can get back to the place before brokenness by focusing on the right values, by reasserting liberalism, by reasserting enlightenment ideals. Then there are the radicals or the revolutionaries. These radicals say, you know what, things are broken, and we need to understand the foundations for that brokenness. There was something inherent

in that worldview, in the worldview of liberalism, say that got us to this juncture. The only way we can solve things is by looking at the root cause, by looking at the root problems. It strikes me that that is the camp that you find yourself in, and I want you to make that case for radicalism and against reformation. Yes. Well, to frame this maybe in a slightly too political way, I think there is a group of people who characterize themselves as the true liberals, and then somehow they have not changed any of their values. It's the way they describe themselves. The rest of society has changed. Liberalism has become illiberal, and they don't quite understand this. What that reminds me of is sort of Marxist professors in the 1970s who describe themselves as the true communists, and the true communism had never been tried. Yes, so that's where I end up being on the not reformist, but more radical side, that somehow things have gone very wrong, and we have to ask questions about not just where did things go wrong five years ago, in the Great Awakening? But centuries ago. At least 50 years ago, which is when I put the text agnation, and maybe 100 years ago where Europe self-destructed in World War I, and it became sort of a more fundamentally pessimistic place where a lot of the tech innovation that happened had this very dangerous military dimension. And so from a European perspective after 1914, the question of progress was much more, it was very different from the 19th century, which was sort of much more broadly hopeful and optimistic. So something went wrong

in Europe much earlier. I don't, if we go centuries back, that's... Well, you've criticized the Enlightenment. There are a lot of things that were good about the Enlightenment. It had to go that way, but certainly the French Revolution was already sort of a sort of prototype for these sort of totalitarian 20th century nightmares that we had. And so there's an Enlightenment question of where one could be optimistic about human rationality, human potential in the 1770s in a way that was probably harder after 1789 and what happened in France. So yeah, I think there are all sorts of things that one should rethink. I'm not a reactionary though. I don't think we can go back in any sense. And even if we could go back, wouldn't that just be a groundhog day? If we could go back to 1960, wouldn't that just be a way in which we would cycle and repeat and the WASP establishment with all the things that were good and bad about it, it would collapse like it did in the late 60s and the same thing would happen. And so yeah, so I think there's a part of understanding the history that's very important and understanding what's going on and why it happened that's very important. But then what we must do now may be a very different dimension of the problem. I think that's one of the things I find really interesting about you is I could read someone like a Patrick Deneen or a Rod Dreyer and they might share your

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assessment

of what's broken in the world. But a lot of times, or let's just say a lot of conservatives, a prescription then, is a kind of go-to-the-bunker, take-to-the-hills mentality or let's wind back the clock to before and you're saying, no, the right remedy is to lean into radical progress. Well, I think that it's some way to get back to the future. There's something about futurism that's a little bit retro, but it's never purely retro, right? It's maybe just a quibble with another word that you used. I always think that it's sort of curious we talk about change instead of progress because change is sort of more agnostic on whether it's positive or negative. The point I always like to make is that when Obama ran for president in 2008, the initial slogan was hope and change. And then they actually changed the slogan from hope and change to the change we need, which if you think about it means diametrically the opposite of the first one. The first one was as much change as possible. The second one was the absolute minimum of change that's absolutely necessary. And it was because when people hear the word change, they know you're not using the word progress and they assume it's most likely change for the worse. If you showed up in Detroit and said, when I take over the car factory, I just have one word for you. It's going to be all computers. That sounds like change. It doesn't necessarily sound like progress. So this probably is a way that our society broadly has become small C conservative in the bad sense of being just reflexively anti all change, where it's assumed that most changes change for the worse. One riff on the 2016 election or the 2020 election. There's one level where you can just think of both of them as talking about change or certain types of change. But the real attacks, the attack on Hillary was the country's going to change in this radical left direction. If you let her and then the Hillary attack on Trump, he was going to change the Constitution. They were both described as these people who were crazy change agents and perhaps in both cases were less than one might have thought because people don't want change. But of course, the reason we don't use the word progress is that sounds so much harder than even change. Peter, I'm not going to ask you your net worth because that seems uncouth, but according to Forbes, it's at least several billion dollars. You gave something like 30 million dollars to candidates in the last election cycle. And I guess I'm left wondering, why don't you give 10 or 20 or 30 times more? In other words, you claim that things are broken, so broken that we need a radical resolution. And yet here you are with a tremendous amount of capital, a tremendous amount of power. Why aren't you doing way more? And I want to add to that, you know, you famously got citizenship in New Zealand, you're reportedly getting citizenship also in Malta. What signal does that send to ordinary Americans about your bullishness about the future of America? Look, these are, this is a very fair set of questions. And whenever I think about it, I think I'm not doing nearly enough. I keep thinking that I'm not doing enough on biotech and radical life extension or even just trying to invest in curing, you know, just a lot of these very big chronic diseases that we have. You know, there are all these places where we're in a society where a lot of stuff doesn't work and even money doesn't work that well. It doesn't sort of translate in a turnkey kind of a way. I think I would invest billions of dollars in biotech if I think we could get things to work. And the money is a part of it, but the bigger problem is finding people with the ideas, finding a path forward. And I think the political problem on the Republican side surely is not a narrow money problem, but much more, you know, a lack of

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ideas.

You know, two of my friends colleagues were running for Senate in 2022. And, you know, I was hopeful that the Republicans were going to do better in the midterms just sort of by kind of default reaction to Biden, to a sense that things weren't quite on the right track. But if, you know, I was honest, that's not, it's not quite enough to do things. And we did not have that many ideas. There was sort of this, I don't know, I think the two rival frames are still the defunct Paul Ryan ideas from a decade ago that are basically where you checkmate in one move, and then something like the passive aggressive nihilism of Mitch McConnell. And that didn't seem like enough to win the battle of ideas to me. And I think that's probably the more important thing. So yeah, there are all kinds of things I would, in theory, it seems like there's a lot of room for nonprofits to do things. And then in practice, you find they're so badly run, the priorities are so. But if I'm you, I'm looking at what George Soros has been able to accomplish, let's just say among the DAs and progressive cities. And I mean, that's a lot. He accomplished a lot. You might not like his vision, but you can't look at that and say he didn't enact a different reality with money. I think you have to always ask a very tough counterfactual question where what would it have been different if he didn't do it? And I think a lot of these cities were just on an arc where they were going crazy. And they weren't solving problems. And yes, de Blasio was a very bad mayor for New York City. But if we were honest about it,

I think Bloomberg was the most overrated ever. He didn't solve any of the real problems in New York. The public schools were worse. The cost of living was spiraling out of control. And the sort of elitist liberalism of Bloomberg, the natural sequel to it was going to be the sort of fake populist socialism of de Blasio. And yeah, there was some way in which Soros got to push the button and pretend to do it. But I think it was, you know, the money had a role, but I think it was much more the sort of structural things that drove it. There is a tendency among people in your cohort, super smart, in the world of tech, very, very wealthy, who seem to have come to a similar consensus that I hear often, which is America's inexorable decline. There's not much we can do about it. We can't really save it. And so the best thing that we can do is sort of take to the hills with good wine and sort of watch it unravel.

I don't think, man, I don't think very many people believe that or at least believe that conclusion. Okay. Look, I think there's a lot of pessimism about the US. I don't think it's particularly centered on Silicon Valley. I think Silicon Valley in some ways, you know, was delusionally optimistic about this country more than overly pessimistic. The problem of, let's say, technological and scientific stagnation is a global problem. Maybe it is an American problem because we were the frontier country and if we're not progressing, somehow there's a way in which the problem is centered on the US, but it's not like scientific, technological progress is really happening anywhere else. I don't think it's even happening in China. You know, they're good at copying things. The jury is still very, very out on how much real innovation is going to happen from there. It's not particularly happening in Europe, which is sort of in some ways even more sort of small sea conservative, opposed to change than the US is. Well, I asked a few people in your world, what should I ask Peter Thiel? And to a person, they basically had the same suggestion, which is ask him if America can be saved, which seemed to suggest to me that maybe you don't

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think that it can. Oh, look, my answer on this is always, it's always up to us to do it. There's always room for human agency for us to make a difference. There are ways that I worry that, framing the question as can America be saved puts 100% on the focus on politics, which I think is very important. But I also think that there are a lot of ways where surely it's going to be somewhat bottom up. You know, it's going to be people coming up with new innovations, new businesses that change it. And it's unlikely to be saved by some kind of top down plan coming out of Washington DC. That I'm very skeptical of. You said something in an interview with Peter Robinson that I found really interesting. You said there are basically three options for the future. One, Islamic Sharia law, two, totalitarian AI, Allah China, and three, hyper environmentalism, Allah Greta. And the challenge you suggested is to offer a picture, a charismatic picture of the future that's better. That was in a European context. I think the US, I'd probably do more crazed identity politics instead of environmentalism. Okay, so call it crazed identity politics. Do you see the emergence of another option and can life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness be that option? Or is that simply not charismatic enough? I think it is somewhat too abstract. And we are human beings. We're physically embodied in our world somehow. And so it has something to do with the communities and cities we live in with what our environment looks like. And so I can picture all these, what I'm always talking about is literally a concrete picture of what the world looks like. And those three pictures, the Greta one, the Sharia law, and even the Chinese communist AI that's monitoring everything, you can sort of roughly picture what those societies look like. And then what's sort of been, I think, a weakness on the center right is we don't have as strong a picture. In some sense, it shouldn't be a top-down picture, but it is just a picture of how things would look different. And I think there are ones you can do on the level of individual companies. So Elon Musk started SpaceX and they have a picture of sending humans to Mars. And that's not enough to compete with, let's say, Greta among the broader population. But if you had sort of a series of futuristic alternatives like that, that's one way we get back. But that's what seems to be missing. And again, I don't have all the answers. This is more just a diagnosis of where we are, that the pictures are not as concrete as I'd like them to be. There was a picture that was offered up in Kentucky for about two weeks at Asbury University, where you had this revival going on, where students were praying for more than 250 hours, sort of came to the chapel one Wednesday morning and never left. Were you aware of that story? You're a believer. You've talked about how Christianity is the prism with which you look at the whole world. Is there something in that picture that you feel could be, if not, cosmically redemptive, redemptive for America? I think it's a very important part of it. It's a very important part of what's going on. I think of the woke religion. In some ways, it's anti-Christian. In some ways, it's hyper-Christian. There's something about Christianity that involved this change of perspective where Christ was a victim. It's already Judaism has, it's from the point of view of the Jewish people who are oppressed by Pharaoh in Egypt and or the story of Cain and Abel is told from the point of view of Abel, whereas the normal story is told from the point of view of Romulus, the founder of Rome who kills his brother. Cain, the founder of the first city in the world, Romulus, the founder of the greatest city of the ancient world, they're the same story. The Bible tells the story from the point of view of Abel, the conventional pagan closed culture tells it from the story of the winners from the story of Romulus. There's something about the Judeo-Christian heritage of thinking about the problem of violence, the problem

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of all these injustices that's very important. I think there's something about that that's gone very, very wrong where you can think of the woke religion, it's like Christianity, but there's no forgiveness. Then maybe if you're right that there's been all this injustice, but you're never going to forgive anybody, there's never going to be a solution. I have an intuition that the identity politics and wokeness are on one level, they're a distraction from these materialistic economic factors like real estate or lack of productivity growth. But to the extent there's something deeper going on, it's much deeper and it's something like A yearning for God. A yearning for God, for meaning, for what it all means. I don't know how you'd engineer that from the top. Do you think you're ripe for a third grade awakening? I would be so hesitant to even speculate on that. I'd say something like only God knows. You've said that the destiny of the post-modern world would be either limitless violence of runaway mimesis or a piece of the kingdom of God. What did you mean by that? It is always the question of whether the stagnation itself, if you steelman it, I've been so critical of the stagnation throughout, but if you were to steelman it, it is that people are right to be scared of runaway tech because nuclear weapons, thermonuclear weapons are dangerous. Is the AI going to take our civilization to a next level, or is the singularity a black hole where the AI is going to kill everybody on this planet? Is there something about all these science fiction movies that give a very different picture of the future, but it's often quite dystopian? It's the Matrix. It's the killer robots. It's all these different scenarios. And so I think the sort of Christian cut I have on this apocalyptic dimension is that it has nothing to do with God. It's not some fundamentalist God who is going to come with fire and brimstone. It is just this very permanent problem of human nature, human violence. And that's no different from what it ever was and ever has been. But there's also a historical dimension where it works in a very different way, given the science and the technology. But that's just a teaser. If you were to steelman the pro-stagnation people, this is sort of, you know, if the alternative is that the world's coming to an end, maybe Greta with her bicycle is the best option. After the break, a lightning round with Peter Thiel. We'll be right back. Okay, Peter Thiel, what's your favorite Bible verse? It's lightning. Oh, man, I'm so hard. I guess just the conventional God so loved the world that whoever believed in him should have, I have to get them. God so loved the world that he is the only son that whoever believed in him should have everlasting life. Describe Mark Zuckerberg in one word. Driven. Describe Elon Musk in one word. Fearless. Do you read the New York Times? There's a lot that one could have learned from reading Pravda and the former Soviet Union. So yes. Do you believe in UFOs? No. Who's the greatest chess master of all time? Bobby Fisher. What's the most important book you've ever read? René Girard's Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World. At the core of Girard's worldview is the idea of the scapegoat. Do you ever wonder if you've been scapegoated? Yeah, but it's not helpful for me to go around saying that I'm a poor and persecuted Peter person. Should we be scared of chat GBT? Rather, I am scared of chat GBT. Should I be? I'd be very worried if you weren't. What's one thing most people think is true but you think is nonsense? People think of globalization as a final synthesis. It's actually just a maintenance of absurd contradictions. It's just an theses antithesis set of contradictions.

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What's one thing most people think is nonsense but you think is true?

I believe in a nonviolent God and I think both the atheists and fundamentalists need to agree on the violence of God even if they disagree on the secondary question of whether or not God exists. What did it feel like or did you even notice when Gawker 2.0 shuttered a few weeks ago? Barely noticed. You killed Gawker but did Gawker conquer the media world anyway? Gawker's power consisted of it was the combination of a hate factory with a veneer of objectivity and that no longer exists. The hate factory is still going but it is far weaker than it was a decade ago because people can see through it. In 1999 you had a Roth IRA worth less than \$2,000. It's now worth upward of \$5 billion totally tax exempt. When this was made public, a lot of people had the reaction that our tax code is broken. What would you say to those people? There's no crime in arranging or finances to try to minimize taxes. Do you put limits on how many hours you use your iPhone? Unfortunately, no but I have virtually no apps on it so I can't do very much with it. Do you use Signal? Yes. Do you use any social media? I use Facebook. Have there been any marriages yet from the right stuff, the conservative dating app that you funded?

No clue. Can humanity conquer death and should we want to conquer death? We haven't even tried. We don't even, we should either conquer death or at least figure out why it's impossible.

Is it true that you're signed up to be cryonically preserved when you die so that you might be brought

back to life in the future? Yes but it's a thing of it more as an ideological statement.

So it's true? Sure. I don't necessarily expect it to work but I think it's the sort of thing we're supposed to try to do. Have you signed up other people you love? I am, I'm not convinced it works. It's more, I think we need to be trying these things. It's not there yet. What do people misunderstand about you most? I don't always have a master plan. I'm just trying to figure things out.

What have you been most wrong about in your life? I don't even think it's healthy to think about that too much. I don't dwell on failures. Maybe that's a mistake but I never dwell on failures.

We've talked a lot about things that are broken and challenges that face the US. What's something that

you feel happy and excited about right now? What makes you excited to get up in the morning?

Two young daughters. How has fatherhood changed you? It focuses, it focuses you on the question of the future in a very different way where you think about, our kids should still be alive in the year 2100 and then the question is what sort of world they will live in and how does that fit in with everything we talked about in this whole interview?

Peter Teal, thank you so much. Awesome. Thanks a lot.

Thanks for listening. No matter where you stand on Peter Teal, share this conversation with your friends, your family, your community, and use it to have a discussion of your own.

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