

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / What We're Listening To: Does Anyone Have a Right To Sex?

Hi guys, it's Barry with a really exciting announcement for you.

As listeners of the show will know, one of the reasons that this exists in the first place is to embody and promote honest, frank conversations and good faith debates, both of which feel increasingly rare in our polarized country.

That is why I'm so excited to announce that the Free Press, along with FIRE, the nation's leading defender of free speech rights, are hosting a live debate on a very sexy and contentious subject on Wednesday, September 13th at 7 p.m. at the historic Ace Theatre in downtown Los Angeles.

The proposition? The sexual revolution has failed.

Arguing for the proposition is co-host of the podcast Redscare, Anacachian, and author of the case against the sexual revolution, Louise Perry.

They're going to be facing off against musician and producer Grimes, and writer and co-host of the podcast A Special Place in Hell, Sarah Hader.

I'm going to be the moderator and I couldn't be more excited.

This is going to be an amazing night.

It's a chance to meet other people in the real world

who also like thinking for themselves and who listen to this show.

You can get your tickets now by going to [thefp.com backslash debates](https://thefp.com/backslash/debates).

Again, that's [thefp.com slash debates](https://thefp.com/slash/debates).

I can't wait to meet some of you guys in person.

And now, here's the show.

I'm Barry Weiss. This is Honestly.

And today, we have a very special episode for you.

As I mentioned last week at the top of the show,

our hardworking audio team is currently taking a very well-deserved break.

So instead of playing reruns, we decided to share some of our very favorite episodes from other podcasts that we love to listen to

and that we want to put on your radar.

This week, we're featuring an episode from Conversations with Tyler,

hosted by Friend of the Free Press and previous Honestly guest, Tyler Cowan.

This particular episode is a conversation between Tyler

and the philosopher Amiya Srinivasan about her book,

The Right to Sex, Feminism in the 21st Century.

Tyler and Amiya debate questions like,

what is our right to be desired if there is such a right at all?

How are our sexual desires shaped by the society that we live in?

Is consent sufficient for a sexual relationship

or is something more or less required?

How should we address falling fertility rates across the West?

What did women learn about egalitarianism during the COVID pandemic?

And why Amiya thinks that progress requires regress?

This episode got a lot of attention when it first came out

and a lot of reactions.

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I was one of those people, by the way.
I listened to this and then I sent it to a dozen people
I know telling them they had to make time for it.
The reason is because it's contentious and yet respectful
in a way that I think is increasingly rare in public life.
As Tyler wrote at the time on his blog about this conversation,
you have to learn to learn from people who bother,
annoy, or frustrate you.
If you do, they will not in fact bother,
annoy, or frustrate you.
I couldn't agree more.
And this conversation between these two people
was a big inspiration for me
for our first ever free press live debate
happening next week in LA on the following proposition,
as the sexual revolution failed.
So if this episode today inspires you, frustrates you,
annoys you, or challenges you,
please consider buying a ticket to the event
Wednesday, September 13th at the Ace Theater in downtown LA.
You can find tickets at thefp.com forward slash debates,
but act quick because we are almost sold out.
We hope to see you there.
We'll be right back and then we'll bring you
Conversations with Tyler.
Have you heard of Israel?
It's a small country in the Middle East.
Doesn't get much press.
But how about the war that was fought in Israel in 1973?
Whether you consider yourself a buff
when it comes to Israeli history
or don't know the first thing about it and want to know more,
I have just the podcast for you.
It's called Unpacking Israeli History,
and they're marking the 50th anniversary of the 1973 war,
otherwise known as the Yom Kippur War,
with a three-part mini-series that dives deep into the heart
of this critical moment in Israel's past.
Unpacking Israeli history unveils untold stories,
unsung heroes, and the intense battles
that define this historic conflict.
You'll gain a fresh perspective on the sacrifices,
the challenges, and the spirit that emerged from that war

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and how it changed Israeli society.

Listen to Unpacking Israeli History on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your podcasts.

Conversations with Tyler is produced by the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, bridging the gap between academic ideas and real-world problems.

Learn more at [Mercatus.org](https://mercatus.org).

And for more conversations, including videos, transcripts, and upcoming dates, visit conversationswithtyler.com.

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to Conversations with Tyler.

Today, I'm here chatting with Amiya Srinivasan, who has rapidly become one of the best and best-known philosophers. She's a professor at Oxford University.

She has a new book out, which has made bestseller lists everywhere, called *The Right to Sex*.

It has been one of the huge, big hit books of the year.

Amiya, welcome.

Thank you so much for having me, Tyler.

I'm really pleased to be here.

Now, you've described yourself as a utopian feminist.

So in your vision of utopian feminism, how much room is there for what I would call compartmentalization?

So just to give a simple example, if you look at, say, stand-up comedy,

a lot of it is sexist or racist, or even if it's not, it's perceived as such, what happens to that in the utopia?

Do we just compartmentalize and let it continue, or how do you treat it?

I'm not sure about room for compartmentalization.

I do think there's a lot of room for context.

So, for example, when you're thinking about the violence in rap lyrics, right, an obsession that began in the kind of conservative, pearl-clutching right in the 80s,

you've got to think about what those invocations of violence are doing performatively in a piece of art that is rap music.

And it's not the same thing as someone standing up in the middle of the town square, trying to deliberately incite violence against people, right?

So I think, not even speaking about the utopia, just speaking about how we should think about performative utterances right now, I think we need to address them with a great deal of contextual sensitivity and think about, in general, what is happening in these particular cases, right?

So what seems to be problematic might not be, but then let's be honest,

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like if you've spent any time in a comedy club,
and I recently did that when I was last in LA,
I mean, there is just a lot of quite naked sexism there.
It's pretty shocking despite the fact of this kind of feminist revolution in comedy,
just how much stand-up comedy is just really quite comedically boring in sexist.
Now, there's this question about, I take it that one of the thoughts you have is something like humor.
Right, which is a brutal element to it.
How humor fits into utopia is a long-standing puzzle,
because humor is often brutal, right?
Look, I don't think the utopia or the kind of post-revolutionary world
is a place without any form of brutality, and it's certainly not a place without humor.
It's going to have disappointment and heartache and tragedy and tragicomedy.
Human foibles will still exist, heartbreak will exist,
and so with all of those things, you have humor.
I mean, what I think is very limited is the thought,
I'm not suggesting that you're advocating for this thought,
which is that what you basically need structures of organized political oppression,
like racism, to have humor.
I mean, the Greeks had humor without having racism, right?
They had other systems of domination,
but they had a great and advanced set of humor,
often directed at intellectuals and philosophers,
who I think are often very much a worthy target.
I think there can be this view on which ending forms of domination and oppression
somehow drains life of all that is special and textured about it,
humor, love, intimacy, friendship.
I just don't think that's true.
I think, in fact, what the end of domination would do
is release us more fully into the specific things that make human life worth living,
including humor.
Now, there's an interview with you where you described your own work and book,
and I quote, as discomfort, ambivalence, and truth-telling.
I thought that was a good take, but I suppose my thought is this,
if you're always carving out space for context and ambivalence,
is there some path along which you end up in a kind of social conservatism,
admittedly a feminist social conservatism?
But let me ask, what parameter values would have to be different
for you to end up as mostly a social conservative?
You don't have to think that the values are that way,
but what does that counterfactual look like?
Where I am the astronaut of social conservatism.
You end up as a social conservative because there's always context,
there's always ambivalence.

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You're carving out these spaces with multiple perspectives, right, building these worlds, and sort of without intending it, you create all these spaces where there's plenty of room for social conservatism, which is then respected and intact.

So, I mean, I should say that while I'm ambivalent about some things, I am very adamant about some other things in the book, right?

So, it's not that my general take is one where we should be ambivalent about every question, or we feel like we can't come down on certain sides.

So, for example, I have very strong, and I think, you know, within the American mainstream, very controversial views about the decriminalization of sex work, for example.

I think there's a very clear case grounded in basic political considerations and ethical considerations for why we should decriminalize sex work totally.

But I do think there are other cases, for example, where we're thinking about how to deal with sexually abusive men, or the relationship between radical politics and state power, where we have to be more circumspect and ambivalent, right?

And so, I don't want to say that I just, my general kind of political outlook is one of ambivalence.

So, what's the closest path counterfactually, right?

Is that the question between me and sort of like a conservative worldview?

I mean, I can tell you the parts of conservatism that are sort of most attractive to me.

But to get you sort of all the way there, like someone might say, well, if the costs of single-parent families were much higher than I thought, I would be a social conservative.

I'm not saying that has to be your answer, but that would be a kind of answer to the question.

Yeah, it's an interesting, really interesting question.

I'm not sure I'm going to give a very good answer to it.

I think there are interesting questions about the place of community, tradition, ritual continuity in human life, and their relationship to value.

And I think conservatives, in the true sense of conservatives, are sometimes correctly criticized the left for not paying enough attention to some of those things that really do give human life life value.

And there's a question about how you make room for those things in a society that's also radically democratic and plural.

I think liberalism's answer hasn't been a hugely successful one.

And so the left has to offer an alternative, right?

An alternative vision on which you can have real community, affinity, certain forms of collective ritual tradition, but in ways that aren't oppressive.

And I suppose that my closest path to conservatism would be, if I were the kind of person, which I'm not, who just thinks that actually the only plausible model for those things is a kind of non-secular,

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broadly speaking, religious, but also culturally and ethnically insular vision of community. I in no way endorse that, but I think that I have, and we on the left generally, I'm not including you, people who are on the left generally, do have more time for that part of the conservative critique than just sort of liberals who think that, well, no, you can just have a basic pluralistic society in which everyone is within certain constraints able to live their vision of the good life so long as it doesn't impinge on anyone else's ability to do the same. And that's totally workable.

I think that vision has left us in a place of mass alienation, unhappiness, and a certain kind of spiritual vacuity. And you can have that starting point and go in very different ways, and you can go very right-wing from that starting point. That's just not the way I go.

It seems to me that as we move closer to what you call a feminist utopia, or just in general, make improvements of the world, that men and women will become more different.

So there's an empirical literature that suggests in more egalitarian societies, personalities of men and women are more different, the evidence on STEM, right?

There's more STEM majors per capita or proportionally in Iran than in Sweden.

So when things are very bad, men and women in certain ways are forced to become similar as things get better, they seem to become more different, right?

So, I mean, are you comfortable with the probable reality that in a feminist utopia, men and women will be more different than they are today overall, on average?

I would just deny the premise.

I mean, I think there's so many confounds in the contrast between Iran and Sweden.

But it holds for countries in general, right?

In countries with less gender egalitarianism, women are more likely to be STEM majors.

Countries with a high degree of gender egalitarianism, such as the Nordics, have relatively low proportions of women as STEM majors.

Yeah, relatively.

I don't think those places are.

I mean, in the Nordic countries, single mothers are still the worst-off demographic.

You still have very entrenched gender stereotypes.

You still have very high rates of sexual violence.

I mean, when we're talking about gender equality, yes, they are better in some ways.

But I don't think these differences are profound enough to be able to give us any deep sense of what it would look like to do something that many feminists like me would like to do, which is abolish gender as such.

I think it would be, just as Mil thought, it was ridiculous to try and ascertain what women were kind of innately oriented towards doing or what their capacities were for doing, what their capacities were under the conditions of 19th century patriarchal England.

I think it's pretty ridiculous to try and read it off of the differentials between Iran and the Nordic countries.

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So I'm imagining a world in which gender doesn't exist, right?

So you have people with varying different kinds of bodies.

So to restate your hypothetical is the question, how would I feel about a world in which people who are quote unquote female bodied were gravitated towards certain things and people who are male bodied gravitated towards other things?

Sure.

Like men seem to value women's looks more highly in gender egalitarian societies also.

There's a lot of independent bodies of literature.

Sorry, Kyle, I just got to stop you here.

We are not going to have a productive conversation if you begin by just describing the Nordic countries as gender egalitarian countries.

In relative terms, they are, no?

That's like calling them socialist.

Like, yes, they are slightly more socialist as compared with the US.

But the idea that they are gender egalitarian is to just massively understate what it is that feminists and what it is they envision when they're talking about liberation from patriarchy.

It's much more than just slightly lower rates of sexual violence, a smaller wage gap.

I mean, these are the kind of things that the feminists of the late 60s and the early 70s, the radical feminists of the women's liberation movement, they thought those things were just trivial.

They demanded them, but they thought that they should be answerable very quickly.

Now, they were wrong about that.

They were wrong about just how deeply entrenched the status quo was, and they were also wrong about the rise of the new right in the US and the UK.

But their sights have always been set on something far more demanding than what we see in the Nordic countries today.

But if we think of male subjection of women or male's writings in general, he's really a master at using cross-sectional variation from what he observes to draw inferences.

And I'm worried that in your view, we don't really have access to evidence.

You don't see enough variation in the data period.

That strikes me as epistemologically nihilistic in a way.

And that sooner or later, you're going to use cross-sectional evidence such as comparing sex workers in New Zealand to sex workers in Germany in ways that are inconsistent with your broader skepticism about cross-sectional evidence.

No?

Well, no.

So there is great variation in legal regimes and how they treat sex work.

So you have a country like the US where sex work is almost entirely criminalized and very heavily criminalized as well.

So laws against sex work are routinely enforced by a very powerful police system.

And then you have countries like the Nordic countries, which experiment with the so-called Nordic model, which are supposed to attack demand but not supply.

You have countries like the US where you again have sex work, but it has a different regulatory

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form, New Zealand, New South Wales.

And there have been very intensive studies about the different effects on sex workers in these different regimes.

And sex workers write about these things all the time.

So it's not like I'm a nihilist whatsoever or certainly not a skeptic.

I mean, I think we should look at the evidence.

But I think we should also be intensely cautious about drawing precisely those conclusions that have been drawn over and over again in the history of thinking about women and men and thinking about gender conclusions that would want to suggest that women are innately drawn towards certain forms of activity and labor and self-expression.

So just to give you some examples here, have you looked at the data on gendering and infancy, the way in which you can get young children?

And by the way, this happens in the Nordic countries as well.

They can actually identify those toys that are associated with girls and boys like pre-verbally.

There's also data that shows that the way that parents interact with their infants differs greatly depending on the infant sex, right?

So boy children are allowed to roam more freely on the ground.

They are like picked up less often, held less often.

They're described in different terms.

So boys are like bold and energetic and creative, you know, girls are like sweet and pretty.

I mean, the idea that this sort of thing, that there's any example of a known society where we're so distant from that, such that we can start to get a good grip on what women and men are innately like, I think is epistemically naive.

I'm not saying that this stuff isn't interesting and you might end up being right in the end.

I might end up being wrong.

That would be a parameter value that might get you closer to social conservatism, maybe.

No, it really wouldn't.

Part of why I find this whole kind of discourse problematic is because, I mean,

I think we should be suspicious when we find ourselves attracted to data,

very, very thin and weak data that seems to justify beliefs that have held great currency in lots of societies throughout history in a way that is conducive to the oppression of large segments of the population, in this particular case, women.

But I also think one error that is consistently made in this discourse and this kind of conversation about what's innate or what's natural is to think about what's natural in terms of what's necessary. So this is a point that Shulamath Firestone made a very long time ago, but that very few people register, which is that, and it was actually made again to me recently by a philosopher of science, a philosopher of biology, which is that, look, what's natural isn't what's necessary.

I mean, it's not even like what's natural offers a kind of good equilibrium point.

I mean, think about how much time you and I just spend sitting around completely unnatural for humans to sit around. And yet we're in this kind of equilibrium point where vast majority of humans just sit around all day. So I think there's just a kind of separate question about what humans as essentially social, cultured, acculturating creatures, what our world should look like. And that's distinct from the question of what

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natural predispositions we might have. It's not unrelated, but I don't think any of us think we should just be forming societies that simply allow us to express our most quote unquote natural orientations. Should women's chess as a segregated activity continue to exist? We don't segregate chess tournaments by race or by anything, or sometimes by age, but anything other than gender. Yet women's chess is a whole separate thing. Like, should that be offensive to us or is that great? I don't really have a view on that.

But you're opposed to segregation more generally, right? Isn't it odd not to have a view on that? No, I don't think it's odd to not have a view on something about which there has been a great deal of ink spilled. So there are philosophers, theorists of games and sports in general who spend a lot of time thinking about how we should organize competitions, gaming competitions in particular. And I don't know what it means to be opposed to segregation as such. I mean, I'm opposed to racial segregation. That is true. I'm not opposed to other forms of quote unquote segregation, like age segregation. So I think, for example, that like, it's okay for certain amusement parks, like clubs, nightclubs shouldn't allow like kids under 18 if you're in this country or under 21. I think there are interesting questions here. I don't play chess and I don't follow competitive chess. So I don't really have a view.

What's the role of self ownership in your moral framework?

So on one hand, I have deep respect for a notion to which we might be gesturing when we talk about self ownership in terms of the sovereignty of the body and maybe a certain set of rights about disposing of ones like body and labor as one chooses. I don't love the talk of self ownership.

I mean, I think that is to import a property model, which doesn't totally get our relationship to the self quite right. If you want to know more, you can ask me.

But you could envision it as a kind of inviolable Kantian autonomy. It doesn't have to be locky in ownership. But I think what I'm getting at is once you buy into enough self ownership, say to have that as a first line of defense against slavery or restrictions on what you can do with your body, how do you square that with a certain skepticism about consent models? Like what stops you from moving from self ownership to consent?

I mean, my skepticism about consent models is very specific in nature. So basically, the way I think that sex exists in our society, which is to say like a broadly patriarchal society at the moment, consent effectively operates as a necessary, though not sufficient condition on ethically permissible sexual activity. Probably not with oneself. I don't think one really sort of asks and gives consent to sex with oneself, but with other people, right? A necessary condition, but I think not sufficient because I think there are cases of ethically problematic sex that are consensual. So one example I talk about in the book is professor-student sex.

Obviously, sometimes professor-student sex, like sex between adults in general, can be non-consensual. But I think there are plenty of cases of professor-student sex which are uncontroversially or should be uncontroversially understood to be consensual, but nonetheless are problematic. There's a deeper feminist critique of the role of consent in sex, which objects to the preconditions that make the ritual of consent asking and consent giving necessary in the first place. So when you say to someone, well, imagine sexual interaction without the ritual of consent giving and consent asking, they just imagine sexual violation. But think about all of the times you interact with, I don't know, an really old friend, right?

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So a really old friend, your like old high school or college buddy, like loses a child, right? And you like put your arm around them and you console them.

Something we haven't done a huge amount of under the pandemic. You don't ask for that consent. You don't ask for consent to be able to put your arm around your body. And the reason is, because the nature of your relationship as friends involves a fine attunement to your friends' desires and needs and wants, right? You don't go into that interaction with the friend thinking, I want something that they might not want, right? There isn't a kind of implicit, presupposed mismatch of desires or wants, right? So it's not a contractual exchange. It's not a negotiation. It's like, you wouldn't want to put your arm around your friend, if that's not what your friend needed at that moment, right? So the very fact that we have such an emphasis on consent

when it comes to sexual relations, I think reveals a certain set of background conditions about how we interact sexually, which is to say, there are lots and lots of cases where one party basically wants to have something that the other person doesn't really want, in some sense, to give, where there's a kind of misalignment. There isn't that same kind of level of attunement. I mean, to put it really crudely, lots of people are turned on by the fact that another person, in some sense, doesn't really want to have that sex, right? So then the ritual of consent becomes necessary. It's not the only reason consent matters, right? The other reason consent might matter, and you see this very clearly in kind of BDSM practices, is that sometimes we just don't know what the other person wants because sex is really complex and people kind of perform in different ways. And so sometimes it's really important to just ask someone straight up, right?

As you know, disabled individuals in the Netherlands often receive a kind of sex voucher, right, to transact with sex workers. Is this a good idea or a bad idea? They're a kind of incels, not the way the word is usually used, right? But they're at least in some cases involuntarily celibate. I don't think it's helpful to call them incels. Well, that the literal meaning of the word, right? Yeah, but... But a good idea or a bad idea? No, no, Tyler, I want to get clear on this because it doesn't matter that that's the literal meaning of the word, right? It's not the literal meaning, that's the etymology of the word. The etymology of the word is involuntary celibate. But incels, for example, deny that there are women incels, right? I mean, on your view, definitionally, there are women incels, right? So long as there is at least one woman who is not having sex and would like to be having sex. Incel names a member of a certain particular subculture. And I think this is really politically important because there are lots of men, not just men with disabilities, lots of men, lots of women who are romantically and sexually lonely in various kinds of ways, fall under the descriptor involuntary celibate, but like wouldn't describe themselves as incels, and certainly wouldn't subscribe to a kind of incel ideology. So I think it's of extraordinary political importance not to use the word incel to simply mean involuntary celibate. Good idea or a bad idea? I see why you don't want to use the word because you're already seeing a head to the reductio, right? Well, no, I'm just going to answer the question.

Do I think it's a good idea or a bad idea? I think it's a really difficult idea. I think we have to start with the perspective of sex workers. So why is it that most women engage in sex work? Well, most women who engage in sex work typically do it because they need the money. They can't get better forms of work often because of their status as trans women or a lack of documentation or disability, the rates of women with disabilities are really high in sex work.

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So when you take a population of women who are doing sex work because of those reasons, and then you create a voucher system of the kind you're describing, I mean,

I think you're in problematic territory. I think in general also, which isn't to say.

Let's raise the price, right? You could make the voucher work.

Sorry, Tyler, can I just finish my thought? That's not to say that in a kind of utopian society, you wouldn't have people who operate as sexual surrogates, right? So Charles Fourier, the utopian socialist, imagined precisely this. So he thought that there would be a class of people, a kind of amorous nobility who would have sex with, you know, elderly and infirm people who wanted to have sex, but who weren't otherwise sexually desired. And these people would do it out of the goodness of their hearts, right? They would do it because they were kind of amorous nobility, a kind of no-blessed oblige. The problem is thinking about something like that or thinking more generally about the redistribution of sex or thinking about sex as a thing to be potentially redistributed is that we're working against a background, a patriarchal backdrop on which men routinely think that they are sexually entitled to women's bodies, right? And when that's the real social backdrop, it becomes, I think, very difficult to have these further questions about things like sexual surrogacy in a way that doesn't problematically feed in to the reinscription of women as having a role to play in the sexual servicing of men. And this is the view you get from sex workers. So, you know, radical sex workers like Juno Mack and Molly Smith, who are the authors of *Revolting Prostitutes*, are very uninterested in answering the question of, well, you know, should we in an ideal or even in the real world have sex workers being subsidized by the state to have sex with disabled people? Because they think it's a massive distraction from the reality of sex work for the vast majority of sex workers, which is true. It seems there's a simple David Braybrook-like basic needs argument that, you know, disabled individuals in the Netherlands, there's something very good we could do for them that also lowers the stigma from them having this kind of fulfillment or enjoyment. And then to cite this big external ideological debate and say, well, we're not going to do this for you because we don't like its symbolism in some other set of debates that we think are more important for you. That strikes me as wrong. So, Tyler, let me ask you this. Why are you interested in the question of disabled men having state subsidies for sex? Well, I said disabled individuals, right? No, you just said disabled men. Okay. Well, that's what most of it has been, right? Right. Why is that? In my view, men and women are intrinsically different for biological reasons, including in their attitudes towards sex. And more disabled men are interested in taking up that offer than our disabled women. What are the biological drivers of these intrinsic differences between male and female attitudes towards sex? On your view. Probably ultimately Darwinian, the fact that there's a different investment in child creating and child raising with men than with women. So, we've evolved to be somewhat different. Right. So, you think for men, sex is a basic need, but for women, it's not. No, that's not my view at all. I'm not always sure what basic need means, but I certainly think if there's a voucher system, it should be available to men, women, other genders, however one wishes to talk about it, not just men. Right. So, let me just say, you were asking like, when we're thinking about this policy question, why should we bring in then like a whole like completely orthogonal ideological question? It's like, no, that's what it is to do politics. What it is to do politics and also to like do policy making is to think about the real world consequences of policies that you put into place. So, what I want to know

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and I don't know enough about is what are the effects of the actual women who engage in sex work in the Netherlands? How much do they get paid for this? Are they happy to be doing this? To what extent are they subjected to sexual violence because of this? I mean, how does this change and reflect their like labor rights? That is the question. This is not an orthogonal ideological issue. But yeah, I think I would just get off at the very start when you're just thinking like, sex is this basic need for men. I mean, if we're talking about pernicious ideology, like, I think that is very much a piece of a pernicious patriarchal ideology that thinks that, you know, for men, sex is this basic good, like it's like food or water. The women who refuse to have sex with men are depriving them of like a basic necessity. Women are both that necessity and the gatekeepers of it. I mean, part of the reason this is such bullshit is that if you look at the incels who spend all of their time ranting in precisely these terms online, they are not interested on the whole in having sex with sex workers. And you know who else they aren't interested in having sex with? They're not interested in having sex with non-white women, with women who are not stereotypically attractive, women who are fat, women who are shy, women who are on the autistic spectrum, women who are socially awkward. Why? Well, because they claim that what they're upset about is the deprivation of this basic need, which is sex. But what they're actually upset about is their perceived low status in a sexual hierarchy, right? A hierarchy that rewards men who supposedly get to have sex or are attractive to high status women. So yes, I do think that you cannot have these conversations about sex work and how to legislate it without centrally engaging with questions about patriarchy. Now, I'm a utopian of a sort myself, though maybe different than the way you're a utopian. And I worry about a world where every generation or country, there might just be fewer people, including fewer women. So this is already happening in Japan, in Italy. Fertility rates are falling in many different places. And if we have a world where this population keeps on falling, a number of people living is smaller, smaller, smaller. That's a problem. So let me ask you, what should we do to increase fertility rates? Or is it part of your utopia that we just let population keep on shrinking? Well, you know, as you yourself just kind of implied, although glossed over, there are countries where population are increasing, right? So poor countries, right? Very far from utopia as countries get richer. So in Sahel, part of Western Africa, right, there's seven children to a family. But no one wants that as countries develop, it seems they fall below replacement rates. Sorry, I'm not addressing the question. I'll get to that in a second, the question about what drives falling fertility rates. I was just pointing out that if a country like the US is worried about its population issue, it should be thinking about its immigration policies. This is actually a point that's made by a very right-wing Catholic like Adrian Vermeul, right? And it's one of the things that I think he's right about. Of course, he only wants to allow Catholics in. But in any case, look, the anxiety in so many of these countries about dwindling population is about demographic threat, right? It's not about population as such. It's not about having more workers. It's not about having... But address the anxiety about population as such, because I would gladly triple immigration, but I understand full well the world as a whole cannot rely on immigration to replenish population. And more and more countries are moving into this zone. So you're addressing some other criticism that bugs you

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politically. But just for the world as a whole, as fertility rates fall, what do you think we should do about it? Tyler, the reason I was addressing this question is because I think that some of the ways you frame debates, and I'm very much an admirer of yours, but they unthinkingly just replicate, I mean, profoundly misogynistic and racist ways of thinking that come from the American mainstream. I'm not saying that you're invoking some kind of alt-right ways of thinking. I'm like, this is just the way that people talk about this in the US mainstream is just extraordinary. Exhibit A is Japan, not a white country.

Tyler, just hold on. No, you're trying a kind of guilt by association.

No, Tyler, I'm not. No. I was just saying, I want to get specific on the question.

The specific problem you were asking is like, what do we do about dropping fertility rates in certain countries? Now, I will get onto the question of what you do as such on the question of correlation between development and dropping fertility rates. I'll get there in one second.

I do have thoughts. But I just wanted to say, because so many people listen to your podcast, the first thing we should do when we're talking about dropping fertility rates is think about immigration policy. I'm delighted to hear that you are an open borders person. Okay, let's go on to the next question. As the world moves into utopian territory, what do you do to boost fertility rates?

Feminists for so long, the country in which you live since the late 1960s, have been writing at great length about the extraordinary difficulty of child rearing and social reproduction and childbirth in the US. Okay. And there are similar things that you find, by the way,

in the Italian feminist tradition. If Italy wants to think about this in the British tradition, so, I mean, someone like Adrian Rich wants to distinguish between the potentiality of human reproduction from the actual political institution that is motherhood. What is that institution?

It's an institution that has privatized the responsibility of childbirth, child care, child rearing into individual families, right? There's still no universal 24 hour child care. The idea that you're doing everything you could to encourage people to have children in a society in which precisely because you implicitly recognize as as every good economist that social reproduction is a form of labor, right? On which society depends. But at the same time, don't compensate women who disproportionately perform that labor in any way and make their lives harder than ever before. That's just the kind of central contradiction of early 21st century political life in a place like the US. Okay, so what are some things you want? Universal 24 hour child care, universal excellent pre-K education, you want non stagnating wages that don't presuppose to full time workers,

right? You want a better maternal health care, you want free universal health care. I mean, all of these basic social provisions. Now, you might think, okay, but you know, Scandinavian countries, which have some of this stuff, like don't, well, you know, they have some of this stuff. I think you're already anticipating a settlement, right? So you're reading off the data and saying, oh, it doesn't matter if we did all of that. Even if we did all of that, we would have dwindling fertility rates. And I want to say try it and see. I think you have to rethink also like the nuclear family. I think you have to rethink patterns of family making. I mean, look at what happened during the pandemic. Every woman who thought she was an egalitarian relationship with a man, like almost every woman found out that she wasn't. Why? Well, because she still did all of her employment work and then also had to take the vast majority of social reproduction in childcare, right? That work is systematically undervalued. It's also

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systematically undervalued when it's privatized in the form of health care and nursing. A lot would need to change. Now, you might want to just hold out and say, well, you know, it's only under conditions of intense coercion and desperation that women are willing to have children. And if that turns out to be right, I'll bite the bullet and just say, fine.

Let me ask you a longer question. This is about your work. I'm going to start by reading two quotations from you. The first is, and I quote, one thing history might show us is that it is the profits and not the mere pragmatists who are the most powerful world makers. Here's the other, quote,

one might hope to take a similar attitude about philosophy in general. It's job we might think, not to get the world right, but rather to get ourselves right. Now, those two passages from your work really struck me. Let me continue. If I think about everything you've done, your interest in the genealogical fallacy, what seems to be a broader interest in the biographical origins of ideas as evidenced by your love for Dan Chiasen's poetry book, your interest in our own mental states not being transparently known to us, your new book called *The Right to Sex*, what's your best account of the bigger picture of how all that fits together? Like, is it you as profit and world maker? And these are different parts of the bigger picture? Or just tell me, let it make sense for me, because I see there's something there and you haven't spelt it out yet. Yeah, I'm neither a profit nor a world maker. I was really hoping you were going to tell me, because that's where this felt like this was leading up was like a grand theory of how these things are united. I mean, I share with you the feeling that there is something that unites these different parts of my work, and not just the trivial fact that they're all produced by me. I don't think I have a great account of what that is. And this speaks in part to one of my preoccupations, which you identified, which is the non transparency of ourselves to ourselves, right, the extent to which we can not know ourselves. And in some cases, I think that can lead to what I've called a kind of tragic worldview. But it also implies the kind of necessity of social relations for forms of self understanding, right? So that's kind of why I was hoping you were going to give me the answer to how this all links up. But maybe I can say, I can kind of point to a couple of themes that I think speak across maybe the kind of more epistemological parts of my work and more feminist parts. And you can tell me if any of this rings any bells. So I have this preoccupation, this is what my dissertation was on, with the limits of self knowledge, which is not to say that we never know ourselves, but that this kind of what's called this Cartesian picture, although it's unfairly attributed to Descartes, this Cartesian picture on which our minds are this kind of theater that's totally knowable, which operates as a kind of compensation for the potential unknowability of the external world. I think that's a bad picture of the mind, not for the reasons Freud says, I mean, I think those reasons are right. But those weren't the reasons I gave, I gave a kind of more technical argument in epistemology. And once one has that picture, for a reason I won't totally go into here, it implies that agents can do as best as they can by their own lights, right, and still get things kind of very wrong, whatever the normative system is, right, no matter how much you try to kind of index normative truths to how things seem from the internal perspective, it's still going to be the case that our normative performance is sort of hostage to these external forces. So it gives you this kind of tragic worldview where how we do in the world depends sort of radically on where we find

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ourselves in the world, how we're positioned with relation to the world. And I think that same spirit of kind of tragedy is built into my feminist outlook. So you called me a utopian, and you know, I think in some sense that's right, but I also have a view on which there's really no progress without regress. So for example, I mean, take decriminalization of sex work, right, so I told you I'm adamantly in favor of it. But I think there's an interesting question about whether decriminalizing sex work would have the hoped for utopian effect of transforming the basic relations, the wage relation, the relation women have to work would allow sex workers to refuse sex work, right, whether decriminalization has this kind of transformative ability, or whether all it would do would be to make sex workers better off as workers, but kind of reinscribe sex work into a capitalist order. That might be tragically true, right, but we should nonetheless do it. Or I mean, take the mass entry of women into the workforce, and the way in which that on one hand has kind of obvious benefits for women, on the other hand, contributes to the demise of the family wage and entraps lots of women in forms of work that are alienating and atomizing. And in particular, and this is something that black feminists warned against, right, when middle class white feminists were arguing for mass entry into the workforce, black feminists were arguing for their right to stay at home, right, and to actually be the beneficiaries of a family wage which they had never been. So I suppose there's that kind of tragic worldview that maybe crosses over from epistemology into feminism. And then there's also the interest in genealogy as a method and world making as a method, which I have a kind of epistemological interest in, but I'm also drawn to the history of feminist thought because I think of lots of the theorists in the feminist tradition as being those kinds of prophets and world makers, right, trying to do something where they were engaged in forms of kind of conceptual innovation, which were supposed to actually restructure materiality in some sort of sense, right. So I think, you know, when, for example, prostitutes started calling sex work work, right, calling it sex work, they weren't simply trying to give a new name to something, right, they were trying to do something, reorient our relationship to this practice and have lots of kind of downstream material facts in how we relate to that practice. So the history of feminism is full of these attempts at prophecy and world making. Let me give you my answer to my own question and just to be clear, I am not at all a canonical source here. I'm just making this up like this is not you, but I guess I read you as a conciliant theorist. So there are all these complexities and ambivalences in your own work, which you're well aware of. So to be sure of what you're doing, point is to change the world in a Marxian sense, you want concilience from a lot of different directions. So you're sort of broadly feminist Marxist. So you see Marxism, which has too much emphasis on the objective, and then you see continental philosophy that has too much emphasis sometimes on the subjective. So the interest in biography, genealogical fallacy is somehow sinking your subjective experience with what you feel, you know, is true. And then there are these broader social structures determining things. And we can't quite be sure of our own supposedly Cartesian knowledge. And you want to bring together all those different forces in this broadly conciliant picture in a way that lets you move forward in the Marxian sense of someone determined to change the world, be a prophet, be a world maker, rather than just writing about it. But because you see complexities,

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you need all those things to feed into this big river. Does that at least make some sense to you? That makes some sense. I'm not sure about the word conciliation in particular, just because it suggests a perfect coherence. Whereas I think I see myself as sometimes just embracing fundamental tensions without trying to offer a perfect synthesis. What you describe is also just very recognizable from lots of feminist theorists who, you know, as you say, found Marx either too objective or too obsessed with like quote unquote material, right, insufficiently interested in the psyche and the psychoanalytic, right? So then you bring in Freud, but then Freud and Marx both have their problems right there, either an unwillingness to read the family or an overreading and misreading, right? So I think that general desire to pick up these various kinds of intellectual strains which often come out of male traditions or traditions founded by men, and then we sort of creatively appropriate them and put them in conversation with each other and do something new is very much a kind of feminist tradition of its own. More with Tyler Cowan and Amiya Srinivasan after the break. Stay with us.

What's the best Brian Eno album?

What do you think is the best Brian Eno album?

Another green world, I think, by a long mile, but I love many of them. And then music for airports, especially the bang on the can version, not the original release. Those would be my two picks. Those seem good. I think another green world is up there, definitely.

What do you think of Susan Sontag?

I haven't read Sontag since I was an early graduate student. She made a very sort of strong impression on me as a stylist. I loved reading the whole volume that is against interpretation. I think she's due for a read visiting from me. Certainly there was much about her life that was, I think, very cool and enviable. There's an extraordinary essay, though, if you have an interest in Sontag by Terry Castle in the LRB about Sontag, which offers quite an extraordinary and very humorous perspective. How does your work as a playwright feed into your work as a philosopher? Well, I haven't written plays since I was an undergrad.

But you've written them. It's a lot of work, right? So it mattered to you. Matters to you.

It certainly mattered to me a great deal. And I loved writing plays. And I had a very close friend of mine who was a director when we were undergrads and he would direct them. And that was a really

lovely partnership. And I've always loved the theatre. And I love reading plays. The plays, though, themselves, they were very much inflected by the philosophy I was reading at the time. I think the last, one of the last plays I wrote was about a philosophy professor who had just read too much Kierkegaard. And then so one day when he's out for a run with his son in Central Park, he tries to sacrifice him like reliving the kind of Abraham and Isaac story that Kierkegaard meditates on in fear and trembling. And I think the best theatre, even when rounded in a certain kind of philosophical tradition, is one that carries its philosophy very lightly, which I don't think my play did. Could you have become a lawyer, as you once suggested, might have been the case? Or was that just a mistaken view that never could have happened?

So you asked me my view on modality in general.

Not on philosophical, but your view on you.

Oh, my view on view.

So maybe when I was eight, I thought I could have been a fireman, but I couldn't have actually

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been a fireman, right? So your view is an undergrad that you might have been a lawyer. Is it like me thinking about being a fireman? Or is there a coherent version of you that's now a lawyer? I think it's a very coherent, though less happy version of me that's a lawyer. In part just because it's such a common trajectory for American undergraduate students who especially major in philosophy, which I did, you know, you go to law school if you don't really know what else you're going to do. And I very nearly did that. That was my plan. And then what happened was I won a scholarship to Oxford, so ended up doing graduate school in philosophy. And that's basically what stopped me from going to law school. It's not totally clear to me what I would have done with a law degree. It's more likely that I would have ended up a legal academic, I think, than an actual practicing lawyer giving my dispositions. Is Marquis de Sade strong as a philosopher or just a writer? Is he strong as a writer? I don't know. It's the question, any. Is he strong in any regard? I haven't read the Marquis de Sade since I was an undergraduate because I was acting as a dramaturg for a play about Sade. But you could argue he sees there's something wrong with the Enlightenment or liberal understanding of desire and that it actually leads to untenable places. Or are we reading too much into him? No, I mean, I think that's an interesting reading. And I don't really think I'm not very preoccupied by the question of what his intentions were. I think if it's a useful dramatization of that important observation, then it's useful. But I would have to reread some Sade to be able to comment any further. Why does Walt Whitman interest you? You have done a deep dive. This gets us back to the autobiographical side of your writings, which to me is always under the surface. Never quite comes out. It is. But people over time will bug you enough that in one way or another it will probably come out, right? And thus you love Whitman. Yes, I do love Whitman. I mean, for one thing, I read Whitman deeply as an undergraduate. I didn't know when I read him first. I took a class with Harold Bloom and Bloom was an enormous fan and admirer of Whitman's. I think what I love in Whitman most of all is the combination of this bombastic, plural, all-encompassing, deeply American, deeply democratic with the lower case D desire to commune with life in all its complexity. But that feeling gives way in Whitman to these moments of revolt and withdrawal and a desire to preserve the sovereign self. And I think that is a profound dialectic, one that I can feel play out in my own life, but also seems to me central to much social and political drama. But he's also just a beautiful crafter of lines. How has Hinduism shaped your metaphysics? I remember walking into a Yale metaphysics class. Yale has this shopping period like lots of US universities, so I didn't end up taking this class. And part of the reason I didn't end up taking this class was because I don't remember exactly how the professor started, but very soon into the class, there was a description of the common sense that everyone had. Everyone in the class surely believes that there are middle-sized objects, right? There are tables and chairs here. There are people, maybe the people are somehow special and different from the tables and chairs, but we live in this material universe and this is reality. And maybe there's a higher reality as well, but this is the kind of common sense view. And I was just kind of shocked because that wasn't my view at all. It wasn't the view I'd been raised to have. I mean, I quite literally believed that material reality was, Maya was illusion and that the separateness of persons was also an important illusion. And I believe in some sort of

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metaphysical

monism. And this is sort of why I've never really done analytic metaphysics, even though I've done a huge amount of epistemology. The metaphysics has always seemed to me to start from a starting point that I just find very difficult to get behind. What are my metaphysics now? I don't have a worked out metaphysics. I think I'm more inclined now. I've sort of been vetted into the kind of what Peter Vandewagen called the common Western metaphysics, the kind of common sense

there are middle sized dry goods, there are chairs and tables, I'm sitting on one. At the same time, I think that roughly speaking, Hindu perspective is very much with me. I just don't think it can really be philosophically articulated. I don't think it's fair, at least for me, not interestingly put into conversation with kind of analytic arguments about what there is. What's the biggest influence of Bernard Williams on you? His writing style. And specifically his, are you look disappointed by that answer? Well, substantively, like, is there a problem in him that you feel you're trying to solve? Because I find him quite open-ended. And he's a big influence on so many people he's come into contact with, right? Yeah, I mean, I never came into contact with him. But well, let me just say something about the writing style, and then I'll say something about the substantive thing, because I don't think they're actually that separate. I mean, I think he really does practice philosophy as a humanistic or he did as a humanistic discipline. And if you look at his essays in, for example, the London Review of Books, they're very different from what goes under the name public philosophy today. They are real works of philosophy, right? What they aren't is a philosopher coming down from his Olympian heights and wheeling out a couple of philosophical distinctions, which are supposed to help, you know, the masses get clear on things. It's rather Williams just doing philosophy in a way that's respectful of an audience that expects them to do some work, but that also does some work on his own part. So I think that's very important as a model of how to write about philosophy and how to write for a wider philosophical audience. Substantively, there are lots of things that Williams was interested in that I'm interested in, but just to take one enduring preoccupation. Williams is very interested in the question of perspective and of points of view. And he's very interested in the aspiration to a perfectly neutral scientific description of the world, and very interested in the question of what that leaves out. At the same time, he very much wants to resist a view put forward by Richard Rorty, right, which begins from a recognition of the contingency of worldviews to a kind of nihilistic or skeptical conclusion about the ability to achieve sort of common understanding. And so I'm very interested in that specific dialectic because Williams isn't some knee-jerk realist who just wants to dismiss Rorty and say, well, look, common sense reasoning just gets us on to the true picture of the world, right? He thinks that a purely scientific picture of the world leaves out essential parts of the nature of the world, right? So there you have to take up a certain kind of normatively loaded perspective to be able to describe the world correctly. He's in this, again, in this kind of ambivalent position with respect to these questions about objectivity and value and perspective. And I'm very much interested in that locus of problems. What's the biggest influence of Derek Parfit on you?

I'm worried because I feel like you want me to offer an example of a substantive philosophical... No, Method, the way in which he was philosophical, I think is the greatest influence of his on most people. But your answer may be different. Yes. No, that's absolutely right. The truth be

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told, I think his greatest influence on me was just his quite indiscriminate kindness and generosity, philosophically speaking, right? So he was just wanted to know what everyone thought philosophically

and treated each and every person he encountered, whether a philosopher or not, as someone who could contribute to his own endeavor of making sense of the world. And it was profoundly democratic.

I mean, almost whitmanian, right? And very startling to encounter. So I knew him well, as much as anyone knew him, you know, I knew Derek pretty well. He was my advisor as a graduate student, which isn't the same thing as being my supervisor. So he had no formal kind of pedagogical relationship, but he read a lot of my work and commented on it. But he also just asked me to comment on his work all of the time. And he did this with everyone. There was a kind of generosity and openness and genuine horizontalism about his approach to philosophy that I think is extraordinary. Let me try another read on your work. And this occurred to me when I read Judith Butler's very good review of your book. It struck me that you're, I think, quite a bit more libertarian, small L libertarian than the mainstream gives you credit for. This comes out of your view on sex workers. You're trying to rebuild some new kind of utopian libertarianism based not on capitalism. You see the vanguard here as trans individuals who precisely because to so many people, it's shocking, represent something that is new and breaking down a hierarchy. And that trans is fundamental to your notion of how to undo previous hierarchies, which are anything but emancipatory,

and to rebuild the foundations of some non-capitalistic libertarianism on this idea of ambivalence, complexity, and context, and the sense of kind of novelty, difference, diversity, even shock from the trans movement, and that those are your new foundations. Now, again, I'm not the canonical

source here, but how would you respond to that? I think that's interesting. I think you absolutely identified a strain in my thinking, which I think I've attempted to call it anarchic, more than libertarian, but that's why you call it libertarian. Libertarians typically have a very particular. But forget about them. We know what they are, right? I was talking about the state in particular. So I think the thing you're observing is that I have a huge amount of anxiety about state power and about different forms of domination, including state domination, which distinguishes me from a certain kind of socialist perspective. But I also have, and I think you're also noticing this, a kind of more, not just an anxiety about state power, forms of authority, but also an active embrace of forms of dissensus, innovation, novelty, boundary breaking, boundary crossing. And I think that's absolutely right. And I think trans people, specifically, but queer people more broadly, often participate in a kind of politics of a dissident politics, right? A politics that wants to slough off certain forms of boundaries and constraints. Not always, right? And I don't think that the rights of queer people have to rest on them being a kind of any kind of political vanguard, just to be clear. But I do think it's true that lots of people who have been active in queer politics and queer theory, Judith Butler is one of them, are interested in articulating the way in which trans lives and queer lives can be seen and read as a form of dissidence against gender, but also against class, against racial domination, and so on. But I think there's another part of me, and this gets back to your earlier question about what's the closest version of a media that's a

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social conservative, who isn't totally ready to just embrace a picture that's fully founded on dissidence and breaking down of hierarchies and norms and boundaries, and that's just about the pursuit of novelty and playfulness. Well, I think this is a certain kind of philosophical foundationalism in me that is attracted to the idea of certain human universals and universal forms of human flourishing. Now, I think when we try and articulate what the conditions of human flourishing are beyond the kind of basic, most basic necessities like food and water and safety and shelter, we start getting ourselves into certain forms of political trouble, right? This has historically been a problem for Marxist, where the theory can seem to rest on a particular vision of species being, a particular kind of humanistic picture of what it is to be human and to live a human life well. But I'm attracted to that thought as well. There is that strong part of me as well that thinks that there is some content to the question of what it means to live well with each other, and it's not simply about free exploration and the challenging and disruption of boundaries. So I'm ambivalent between those two things. As we move toward close, let me just see if I can push you a bit and where I suspect I disagree with you most, though I'm not sure I know what your actual view is. You said you're very suspicious of the state, and if I just look, say, at the last 30 Nobel laureates in economics, not one of them will endure socialism, though they have highly diverse views and backgrounds. So if you're suspicious of the state, and if what we know of economics is not so friendly toward actual socialism, why be a socialist? Or am I misunderstanding what kind of socialist you are, or if indeed if you are a socialist? But I take it from your writings that you call yourself one. I don't know if I've ever recalled myself one in writing, but I certainly do identify as a socialist that broadly identifies a democratic socialist. So I'm not particularly impressed, I've got to say, by the fact that the last 30 Nobel Prize winning economists haven't been in favor of socialism. I mean, you'd be hard pressed to find many socialists in the academy broadly for always curing about the way in which the university has been overtaken by Marxist. But I mean, look at philosophy, you almost get none. Why is this? Well, because universities are, for all, I love them and admire them and think they play or can play an important social function, are pretty class selecting. It's no surprise to me that they skew very liberal and very centrist on the whole. So I mean, I suppose the question is, look, what do you do about 21st century capitalism? I think it's uncontroversial or should be uncontroversial that capitalism understood not just as an economic system that embraces markets, right, because at least on how I would use the notion you can have market socialism, but an economic and a social system that is founded critically on a class distinction, right? And we can also talk about racialized and gendered forms of capitalism. We won't go into that though here, or we don't have to. It's uncontroversial or should be that capitalism so understood has been an extraordinary driver, trivially of growth, but also of innovation, of the alleviation of mass poverty, of technology, of medicine. I mean, there's no question I think about that. I just am pessimistic about the induction from that to the conclusion that capitalism is what we should be doing now. I mean, what are the other hallmarks of capitalism? Well, poverty like admits super abundance. I think that's uncontroversial. A tendency to crisis and break, which always disproportionately harms the already worst off. The pandemic is a great example of this. A system that produces forms of work that are, we won't even have to talk about

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the question of exploitation, but just are subjectively very alienating and immiserating for increasingly many people. And finally, a system that has produced the single most potent crisis humanity has ever faced, which is climate change. So my question is, what's next?

What do you think? Do you think capitalism is going to solve all those problems?

I think scientific innovation supported by government, to be clear, is our best chance of solving climate change as a problem. But I would put it this way, I'm a little worried that you're resorting to a kind of genealogical fallacy in dismissing the 30 Nobel laureates as from a particular class background. I would agree they are, but they're also really very, very smart people who've looked at the evidence and they think it's about trade-offs and it's comparative.

And they think that true socialist economies perform worse on all or at least most of the metrics you cite. So what is it empirically that you know that they don't or I don't?

That's where I see a big gap between us. Sorry, what I know and the fact I think they know and you know is that we are in an extraordinary state of crisis. I mean, the other thing I haven't even mentioned is the profound deficit of democracy that capitalism entails. I mean, the idea that the US is a democratic system is just a complete joke. And the idea that what you're going to have is just some campaign finance reform to fix that is ridiculous. I mean, you know, the most important institutions of American political and social life aren't democratically run. That's true not just of the Supreme Court, but it's also true of corporations. So are there trade-offs? Could it be that there would be less growth? Yes. Is that okay? Yes, I think we need to be thinking about a degrowth economy. Is it the case that you're going to maybe have less innovation? Possibly. Are we going to keep on going full steam ahead with a system that causes mass immiseration, that's exploitative, deeply alienating, is not solving the problems that it says that the profit motive is somehow supposed to magically solve? I mean, I think that's the question. Now, when you're asking about what kind of socialist models, I mean, I'm not proposing and I don't think any plausible socialist does propose that what we need is a form of kind of, you know, Soviet state socialism. I think what we need to be thinking about is the radical democratization of the institutions that shape political and social and family life. You're very, very far away from that in the US, but what I'm fundamentally interested in is power of people to make decisions directly, not indirectly through a rigged voting system, which allows them to cast a symbol like every four years for one of basically two identical candidates. I mean, that's not what we mean by democracy. I would hope you would agree as well. So my question is, how do we have people exercising more direct control over the institutions that shape their lives, including corporate institutions? Very last question. After all the fervor surrounding

your book dies down, what do you hope to be doing next? I hope to be getting back to my book on genealogy, which we've spoken about a little bit, the project on genealogy. I've been working on it for many years now. I sort of set it aside for a little bit to complete this feminism book, but it's a book that begins by thinking about the history of genealogical thinking and then dwells in some of the epistemological problems that we were discussing and finally tries to think about the politics of genealogical arguments. Thanks for listening and thanks again to Tyler Cowan for letting us share this fabulous conversation here. If you liked it, you can catch all of Tyler's episodes at conversationswithtyler.com. It's a podcast that I never miss. Last but not least, if you want to support Honestly, there's just one way to do it. Go to theafp.com and become a

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