DarkHorse Podcast with Iona Italia & Bret Weinstein (192kbit...

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**SPEAKERS**

Iona Italia, Bret

**Bret** 00:04

Hey folks, welcome to the Dark Horse podcast. I have the distinct pleasure of sitting today with Iona Italia, who shortly will become editor in chief of Oreo magazine, and is the author of our Tango world. Did I get that? All right, I honor.

**Iona Italia** 00:20

It was perfect. Yes.

**Bret** 00:21

Well, welcome to Dark Horse.

**Iona Italia** 00:23

Thank you so much, Brett.

**Bret** 00:25

So this conversation is one I have wanted to have with you for the longest time. And you and I in fact, discussed the possibility of us having this conversation must be a couple of years ago now at least, maybe two or three,

**Iona Italia** 00:38

I think only maybe a year and a half, a year and

**Bret** 00:41

a half. Well, my wife is constantly telling me that I have an atrocious sense of how much time has passed. She's often nicer when she says this. But my interpretation is that I am very bad at figuring out how much time has passed. But in any case, I'm really glad that you're here, I have been reading your book, I won't say I've read it all. But I am fascinated by it in a way that I was not expecting. And so maybe if you'll allow me, I'll just say a few words about where I am with respect to something like Tango, and I'll catch the audience up on what conversation I'm hoping we'll have. So I have a little experience with partner dancing. Mostly it comes from the fact that partner dancing is obviously still a very big deal across Latin America, and I did graduate work in Central America. And so I encountered this and I did enough dancing to sort of know what it's about, I wouldn't say I'm any good at it, but good enough to have had the experience and sort of see what the potential is there. And it has caused me to do a lot of thinking about dance and the West and and where we are and what the two might have to do with each other. And I must say I've thought many times about Tango. It's obviously a very provocative and conspicuous dance in a way. But my sense has always been as much as I would in principle love to be able to tango. Miranda I can do salsa is difficult. For me, Tango is surely so far out of the range of possibilities that it wasn't worth thinking about it in personal terms. And your book changes my opinion of this somewhat. I'm not sure that I ever will. But it does compel me that there would be a reason to try were the opportunity there.

**Iona Italia** 02:42

Well, those are fighting words, because I often visit Portland. So watch out.

**Bret** 02:48

All right. Well, I would be thrilled to try Tango with you. I'm especially heartened, there's one passage in your book, I believe you're quoting someone else who says that as a beginner, you can't possibly be bad that it takes years to become bad. And I love this sentiment.

**Iona Italia** 03:06

Yes, that's actually I'm not quoting anyone. That's my my little aphorism. You can't be a bad dancer. If you're a beginner. It takes years to become a bad dancer.

**Bret** 03:21

Well, it's wonderful. I think I thought it was someone else because it appears at the beginning of a chapter and has a couple of words below it. But anyway, I'm sorry, for misinterpreting. did wonderful. I will just say sort of generally about your book. The it revealed to me something I think you and I are kindred spirits in a way. There's a very famous discussion with Fineman, where Fineman reports that a friend of his accused him and all scientists have taking the beauty of nature and insisting on dissecting it right taking a part of flower where all of its beauty is lost. And Fineman responds to this friend, that that's that he's got it wrong, that in fact, the scientist does take the flower apartment apart to figure out why it works, or how it works. But this gives the scientist both kinds of pleasure, the scientists can enjoy the flower and can enjoy the delight in discovering what it is about, and that one does not detract from the other end. So as an evolutionary biologist, I look at nature and I cannot stop myself from thinking about why why is it the way it is, and that does not in any way reduce my pleasure in being in nature. And in reading your book, I have the sense that you are simultaneously fully invested in the experience of Tango And that you are also fully invested in comprehending what it means and where it comes from and how these things interact. And so anyway, I like a person who is willing to invest in both of those channels. And it makes me all the more helpful that we can get to the deep questions that are raised by Tango, specifically, and dance more generally.

**Iona Italia** 05:26

I think so I have also always enjoyed, I don't have a scientific background at all. But I've always enjoyed reading popular science books. And I do feel there's a real sense of awe and delight in just how complex and beautiful the workings of nature are. And I think that Richard Dawkins book, the ancestors tale is one of the most moving books I have ever read, and it actually moves moved me to tears to read his book. And I also, you know, there are certain science books that have left me in this just state of intense pleasure for days afterwards. For example, I read a book on photosynthesis, which was written quite a while ago, it's called eating the sun, and fate, I don't remember who the author was. But, and I could no longer tell you how photosynthesis works. He explained it in great and careful, meticulous detail, one stage after another. And I remember, you know, a few little little things about it. But I don't remember the mechanism at all, it wouldn't be able to tell you anything about the book. I just remember. It's like that thing that it's that thing that you don't remember exactly what you were told. But you remember how it made you feel. And I just remember this kind of wild sensation, Fayyad finding out just just kind of how much is going on beneath the surface, at this sort of micro level that we don't have access to, when we're just looking with our eyes in in normal life.

**Bret** 07:19

100% agree, I used to refer to this as the cosmic joke. When I was teaching, I would tell my students that there were an infinite number of ways to tell the cosmic joke. But you know, one of them is alluded to in the title of the book you're referring to, right? The fact is, when you look at a tree, to realize that it is literally the process of extracting energy from a fusion reactor millions of miles away, in order to take components of air, and to turn them into sugar and plant fibers, right, just to discover that the air becomes sugar and wood through a fusion reaction that isn't even local to the earth is stunning. And you know, at one level, probably everybody who went through intro bio, knows that at another level until you've realized what an improbable story that is, you haven't understood its meaning, right? It's

**Iona Italia** 08:22

Yes, yes, absolutely. Yeah, I think that there's there's kind of a parallel with writing in that. I have occasionally encountered people who've totally misunderstood the writing process. Once, for example, I was dancing with a friend of mine, and Midtown to attend as a set of songs. So we dance tango for your listeners in the sets of three or four songs. And mid tanta, he stopped, and he got all kinds of panics. And he said, I feel really self conscious, because I'm afraid that as we're dancing, you're describing it in your head and thinking about how you're going to express it later. And this is completely wrong. Writing, at least for me, and I think for most writers is comes from memory. Wordsworth called it emotion recollected in tranquility. And it's when I'm actually dancing, I'm focused only on dancing, and I'm not verbalizing anything mentally, at all. What I'm doing when I'm writing is, after having danced, I'm sitting down and reflecting on the experience, and that's when I'm trying to translate the experience into words. And it's a very, very rough and vague and sort of idiosyncratic translation because dancing and language are two completely different schema but I'm trying to convey how I felt At the time and what the experience was like at the time, but it doesn't detract from the experience at all. It's an entirely separate phase. It's the after, after phase. And it allows me to live through things twice, in a sense.

**Bret** 10:17

So if I can try to translate this into my own language, the model that Heather and I have been using teaching from and deploying is one in which most things, especially things that one does very well, where you get in the zone, and things go really right, your conscious mind, your conscious mind, which is almost synonymous with, we're in our language, it is synonymous with that fraction of your cognition that you can explain that you can exchange with others, your conscious mind is present for these things, but more or less a spectator, right, some other part of you is dancing, or skiing, or whatever it is that you're in, in that flow state. But your conscious mind is paying attention. And it is there to pick up the slack. If there is ever an error, if something that you don't expect causes you to be somewhere, you weren't anticipating your conscious mind can figure out what to do. But you're almost always better off in that state where your conscious mind is aware, but it's not driving. Does that line up with what you're saying?

**Iona Italia** 11:31

I think yes. And yes, and no, I think that's a very good analogy. I think that is when dancing, there's a sweet spot between, it's very pleasurable to just be in a kind of dance trance, that is the sort of check sentiment check sent me high in flow state, that man whose name must always be cut and paste it. And fat cut that kind of sense of just surfing, the music of just being taken by the wave is very pleasurable. And at the other end of the scale, is feeling very self conscious, trying to second guess yourself. Feeling as soon as you For example, if you are off balance when you were dancing, then you immediately go straight back to that this self conscious state of how can I repair this. But for me, the most pleasurable state is somewhere in between where you are. You're both immersed in the experience. And you also have this feeling of conscious competence, of just confidence in yourself, because, you know, you can do this, and you can feel your body moving graciously and gracefully. But you're not having to put an effort to make that happen. But you are you are aware of it. So I find I feel that it's not quite a trance, it's not quite a translate that I like the best. But this, this kind of moment of awareness.

**Bret** 13:22

Yeah, so sort of hovering at the the boundary of consciousness, I think I think these two things that we're describing are alike. But let's, let's delve a little further here. So I do want to say I very much appreciate especially after reading around in your book, The specialness of Tango and it really, I think, from what I've read, it's fair to say it is an utterly unique dance tradition much newer than I realized, you describe in your book, that it is effectively a How did you how did you put it the culture of when Osiris in which it arose? You care to describe it?

**Iona Italia** 14:12

Yes, so Tango really developed. I describe it as an urban folk dance the urban folk dance of when Osiris and it began at the very end of the 19th century. And the real golden age of Tango was between around 1935 and 1955, the golden age of the tango music, and that is when the dance really developed in sophistication. And at that time, and when Osiris when Osiris was a backwater through most of the 18th and 19th century, because there's really nothing there until the Spaniards came and they brought corn and they brought they Brought sweet corn maize and they brought cattle, there was nothing to eat. There was all there were almost I mean, there are very few indigenous peoples in the Pampas region. And there was just this little kind of malaria ridden seaside town. And that was almost almost nothing happening there. And then in the 19th century, there were a number of huge waves of immigration, mostly around half the immigrants came from Italy. And the the two next most largest groups were Spaniards and Russian Jews who are fleeing the pilgrims. When Osiris has one of the world's largest Jewish populations, and at the peak of that immigrant period, more than 60% of people living in Buenos Aires were not Argentine born. At a similar period in New York, it was only around 14%. So when Osiris was several times more, more diverse than, than New York. And unlike New York, when Osiris was never ghettoized, so people were living very close together, people from different nations and cultures and languages were all living very close together in this communal housing, which we call them convent, t shirts. So that's the environment in which Tango developed. And it was also elsewhere in Europe, towards the end of the 19th century, and beginning of the 20th century, many of the European cities were very heavily industrialized, and a lot of people were just shackled to 18 hour a day factory work. And under those kinds of conditions, you can't develop a a nuanced and sophisticated and rich art tradition for art you need leisure. And when Osiris was never heavily industrialized, and Argentina still is, is very much dependent on raw material exports. So there were very few factories and when Osiris and most people were living on living a kind of semi agrarian lifestyle, and selling vegetables from smallholdings outside the city. And that kind of lifestyle is, it's intense work, but only at certain times of day and seasons of the year, etc. If there's bad weather, you have to stay home. And if you stay home, you can take out your guitar and start strumming around and creating a tune and you can get up and do a few steps. So that's the ideal environment for art to develop. And in a sense that it's still happening today. But for for less, less fortunate reasons. All the economic crises, and the very high unemployment and sort of semi employment and kind of casual employment in one size has left people with a lot of enforced leisure, which many people have spent developing Tango.

**Bret** 18:29

So I think the word I would use for this is it's extremely cosmopolitan. I don't know that that's the right word. But you make very clear in the book, in fact, I think you say that dancers of Tango may judge each other based on their degree of skill, but they would not judge each other based on their politics, their ethnicity, their country of origin. And go ahead.

**Iona Italia** 19:03

Yeah, I think that's true. So the thing with Tango is, you're not primarily talking to each other, so you're not liable to get into an argument. Nor are you kind of getting together in some kind of group. So there isn't a sense of the in group versus the out group. What people are after is an experience of a blissful physical experience on the dance floor. And therefore most people's absolute primary concern is, well, this person gave me a joyful experience on the dance floor. Well,

**Bret** 19:42

you say this. I mean, we're in very different situation because you're in London, and I'm in the US and the US is currently breaking down over political divisions that would cause I believe most people to regard sharing a dance like Tango with somebody from the other team to be essentially immoral. Now I find this preposterous. But the idea that just because you're not speaking words that these things are not taken as a barrier, requires a certain understanding. And it's an understanding that I think Americans were working towards. And we are now losing touch with what we knew quite recently. And so this really is, in reading this passage or the several passages about this topic. And in your book, I was struck by the idea that we have a relatively new dance tradition, and that it functions to facilitate the harmonious pneus within a melting pot, and you describe a melting pot, you know, when Osiris being much more diverse than New York was at a corresponding period. And so I find something very compelling about this idea. And it actually extends the, the thing that initially had me wanting to talk to you about partner dancing. And so if I could just lay that out briefly. My sense is that partner dancing is very important, at least it has been very important in some cultures, and that the loss of a tradition of partner dancing, that is to say, a tradition in which everybody would have participated in it has caused at least part of the derangement that we see in the West, in effect that, especially when it comes to sex, there are certain things that are well worked out on a dance floor that are not so well worked out in a culture where you're expecting to take somebody to bed, instead of going dancing. And in any case, what you write about Tango and about the Cosmopolitan environment in which it's taking place, and the suspension of suspicion around politics, and ethnicity, and other such matters, all fits quite well. And what I really hope we can unpack is whether or not this is and by this I mean, a dance tradition that involves couples. Is this an important tool in the human toolkit that when removed, causes some kind of predictable and important dysfunction.

**Iona Italia** 22:46

I think that there are very, very bitter political divides in Argentina. And, I mean, Argentina has an extremely bloody and horrifying recent history. Argentina has only been a stable democracy since 1983. And I mean, the kinds of arguments that people have on Facebook among my Argentine friends, just make Twitter look like a Endless Love bombing, by comparison. But nevertheless, what happens on the dance floor is that the, all the incentives are aligned in such a way as to make it make it favorable for you to to avoid those kinds of conflicts, or to ignore those kinds of conflicts. Because the reward is, if you're dancing with someone with whom you dance, well, who dances well, and with whom you dance, well, the route the reward emotionally in hormonally and everything else is so great that it nudges it certainly nudges you in the direction of disregarding those things. People are exceptionally many people are exceptionally choosy about who they dance with. But almost always they're choosing on the basis of the pleasure that they think they're going to get or not get with that person in that moment.

**Bret** 24:33

But implied in that is that the pleasure will be generated largely by boy, I don't even know how to describe it, but the skill and compatibility of the person it'll it will be resident to the dance space well, rather than a visceral response to the individual On the other side,

**Iona Italia** 25:01

Yes, I think so. Although it's, it's hard to separate those things. So in Tango, one of the most striking characteristics of Tango and the way in which it most differs from many other partner dance forms is the embrace in Tango. And so in most partner dances are you hold each other in some kind of hold, so your your bodies are not that closely touching. Or in many dances, you just hold hands a lot of the time, in say, swaying and Lindy hop and very frequently in salsa. And in Tango, we hold people in as close as we can get it while still being able to move. We hold people in exactly the same way as you would hold somebody in a tender and loving situation. And although in Tango, that is just a gesture, you don't actually love the person. Nevertheless, I think that there are just concomitant effects and hormonal responses. My friend, Janice Wang has done some observational studies on people's hormone levels while dancing. And their oxytocin levels go through the roof. When they're dancing tango, testosterone also shoots up and serotonin and stress hormones go down. There is just a kind of, I mean, if you hold somebody in a very in this very tender manner, then it is very difficult to completely divorce that from the sense memory of, of how we usually Express affection. And it is more I feel that it's an especially intimate way of holding them. So even if in salsa, Miranda in some of these other dance for chatter, you can have more groin, groin to grind, contact. And in Tango, it's very unusual to have below the waist. Well, you have contacted foot and leg level, but it's very rare to have groin level contact. But nevertheless, if you are beginning a romance with somebody, you don't go and stick your grind next to their grind, I don't advise that.

**Bret** 27:32

You know you you how very old fashioned of you.

**Iona Italia** 27:36

And you bring your face close to their face, and you hold their hand. And that is exactly what we also do in when we're dancing.

**Bret** 27:43

So let's unpack that a little bit. So just speaking at the level of the physics, right, if you're holding somebody's upper body very close, then in order not to topple over, you actually have to free the lower body to move right so that you can dance effectively. And, you know, I don't know if you will have noticed this. But I find if I hold a cup of coffee as I walk up the stairs, I have no problem not sloshing it. But if I pin something like a magazine, under my elbow, it becomes impossible not to slosh the coffee out because I've constrained one of the axes on which you would correct and so I think what you're suggesting is that dances probably break down into these two categories, which part of you is going to be free? Right?

**Iona Italia** 28:33

Yes, yes, that's a good way of putting it. It's an embrace is one of the things that that gives Tango a quite steep learning curve at the beginning of the dance. I mean, Tango is a folk dance, it's not a professional dance. You don't have to be a dancer to dance tango. It doesn't require any special flexibility or cardiovascular fitness. A lot of the older dancers are obese chain smoking alcoholics. So it's, it's not like dancing ballet or something. But I think it is the most difficult of the partner dances to begin learning. And that is because it is intrinsically difficult to move with somebody right here in your face. And in order to in order for the dance to work, you have to coordinate your movement quite closely. And it means that you are also have less independence, especially as the follower but both party partners have less independence. If I'm dancing with say Lindy Hop with somebody, and he is not a very good dancer. I might be a bit bored or frustrated, he might be off the music. Maybe he'll be yanking my arm a little bit. But I can still do my part of the dance. Whereas if I Dancing with someone in Tango, who is a very bad dancer, there are ways of compensating and getting around this a bit, which we have to use as we're learning. But if he is that a bad enough dancer, I literally can't move, you know, my my ability to move fluidly and, and on balancing all of those things is absolutely dependent on his moving in a certain way and communicating that to me.

**Bret** 30:27

Okay. So this is very important, I think in order to have the discussion, at least the one that I'm hoping to get to, we're going to have to separate two categories. And you actually do a really good job of exploring many aspects of this in your book, but there are things about partner dancing, that are obviously connected to sex. And then there are other things that distinguish the two things, right? And my hypothesis would be that that boundary is an important one. But what you're describing, I would say, is a place in which dancing and sex have a very close analogy, right? I think it's probably, if you have sex with somebody, and you think it was great, and they think it was terrible, something's off, right? There you go. It was terrible. It was terrible is correct. It is correct, inherently, so. And I would say further, that there's something about I don't even know how to say this exactly. But sex isn't the kind of thing that you have it and you achieve some level of proficiency and you, you know, retire on your laurels with a personal best, it's like, even if you're in a lifetime relationship, as I am with Heather, it's a lifetime exploration and that is mirrored in the idea of a dance in which you know, you, you are coordinating with another person, right to move in such a way that it achieves what you both want to achieve. So it is at least analogous in that regard. And then there are other regards, and this is where this gets complex, I think. Well, actually, I have a question for you that I don't know the answer to from what I've read of your work. kind of father and daughter dance the tango?

**Iona Italia** 32:29

Oh, yes. So in Argentina, you often see family members dancing tango, and quite often, Fathers will take their daughters to the milonga when they're still too young to really go out late at night, because long it takes place very late, too young to really go late at night on their own, so that they can dance. So you do see family members dancing, mothers and sons, fathers and daughters. And there are a couple of professional couples also, who are Parent Child couples and, and or brothers, sister couples. So that that does happen. Because of course there are embracing somebody tenderly, needn't necessarily be a sexual thing, right? There are so many ways to embrace someone and to feel emotion to feel tenderness and affection towards someone. And many of those are not sexual. And some of those are actually not even really loving in that intense way, but more playful, it's more kind of cameraderie way to people are going to go and explore this terrain together. Like I think I compare it to two climbers sharing a rope. Sometimes it has that feeling. But it's also I think there are a few let me outline a few differences. And then I actually have a little passage here, which is not in the, in the part of the book that you read, which if you like, read, because summarize some of my thoughts, probably more eloquently than I can do right now. extempore. But there are a couple of obvious differences and one is there's no orgasm, and Well, hopefully not that could get very messy. But that I think is important. It's not it doesn't there's no feeling of teleology. You're not kind of working towards something, you're just on a kind of plateau pleasure plateau, ideally on a kind of floating and of course that can happen in sex too. But in sex there, there is an orgasm and there is a kind of,

**Bret** 34:50

well well well hold on. Hold on a second. So first of all, we have to clean up the terminology here a little bit because you've got sex in the narrow sense. And you also have sexual interaction whose ultimate evolutionary purpose is reproduction. But that's really the least interesting aspect of how it functions. And so the point is, what you're describing that plateau may not be like the act of sex, but it might be an awful lot like the accompanying relationship, right? The ecstatic feeling at the beginning of a romantic relationship, right would be more like that, right? It's not goal oriented. It is. It is a, a realm that one visits.

**Iona Italia** 35:36

Yes. Although I think even that feeling at the beginning of a romantic relationship can feel very goal oriented, for example, you have a crush on the person, you're beginning to get a few signals back from them of interest, and it's starting to feel really lovely. And your aim is to take it further, you know, you want to kiss them, you want to sleep with them, you want to hear them say that they love you, etc. There is kind of stages a longer a journey. And Tango doesn't really have that kind of feeling that sort of directional feeling. I think that's one thing. At a at it's kind of purely physical level, it's also I think it's fairly rare for people to feel genitally aroused, dancing tango, because it's hard to be aroused when you have to, when you are concentrating intently on something else. So you're focusing on the dance part of it, particularly the leader also things like the navigation in the room. All of that mitigates against that the actual physical arousal, like people also don't usually get an erection when playing the violin and things like that. I'm sure it does happen. But it's a you know, different part of your brain is engaged. And I, the other thing is that, that there is a very strong focus on the music. So in sex, your focus is your own feelings in the other person's feelings. And those are in good sex, those become almost indistinguishable. It's very sex dissolves the boundaries between giving and receiving. But in Tango, you have this third element, which is you want to express how you are hearing the music. And you are expressing that your partner, also to yourself. Also, in a sense to other people who are watching or potentially watching, because unlikely, despite what it says on all of those tea towels and bathmats and things. Actually, you should dance as if everyone is watching. Not in a self conscious way, but because it's just pleasurable to share. And it makes you dance better, it makes your gestures bigger, and your partner notices that you and you feel it too. So there are all those things. And I think that it's perhaps more akin to acting to playing out a love scene in a as to actors. So it's more like a kind of it reminds you of the sexual and romantic rather than being the sexual and romantic and I'm going to read this short passage because maybe this will help, please do. So this is from a piece I wrote called dancing with my girlfriend's boyfriend, and I'm just going to read the last very last part of it. The Tango brace is a very unusual thing. It mimics the appearance of real life affection. Perhaps if you are very jealous person, you shouldn't watch too closely. Just as you might not want to watch your active boyfriend rehearsal I've seen you hold another person close to you for a length of time, which would have all kinds of implications outside a dance context. If you gave someone for long consecutive hugs have three and a half minutes each without moving and they happily let you well things would probably get pretty steamy quite speedily, unless you have exceptionally snuggle friends. But as always with touch, context and intention are everything we don't embrace because we're longing to touch each other. We don't dance because we want to snuggle. It feels snuggly at times. It Feel sensual, but that's the nature of the dance. It's not personal. Our intention, our wish is to dance. Or at least, the dance provides us with plausible deniability. The focus is not on us, we're not a couple. And we certainly wouldn't hug each other for three minutes at a time in any other situation. So I'm talking about my dance partner on Wednesdays hence the title dancing with my girlfriend's boyfriend. Tango is a liminal space between sex and art, but almost always situated deep within arts side of the boundary. its relationship to the central often feels less like raw attraction, and more like an illusion to remind to romance. You feel like a student actress reciting Juliet's lines to whomever the director happens to have cast than like a happy girlfriend, walking hand in hand with your lover. The sensuality the intimacy isn't fake, but it isn't real either. Which is why I can dance in close and brace with other women with great enjoyment but cannot have sex with him. Which is why a friend of mine guiltlessly dances with his sister, which is why most people are monogamous and their love lies but dance with a wide variety of people at the milonga. We need the bumper sticker that says Tango dancers do it all night long, changing partners every 15 minutes sublimated into art, we can take something which is usually exclusive, and without getting rid of all its eroticism, transform it into something that can be widely shared. It's a magical mutation, a midwinter night's dream, a topsy turvy approach, a land of Lavenders Blue lavenders green, if you are King than I will be queen. I'm not threatened by this when I'm in a couple. And I'm not guilty about it when I'm not. It's fundamentally both innocent and deeply life enriching.

**Bret** 42:09

Alright, beautiful. And it leads right where I'm hoping we'll go. So the Yeah, let's do that. The question. So you write as if the purpose is contained in the dancing? And it may be? I mean, at least partly it is. But I'm betting that partly it's not? Yes,

**Iona Italia** 42:39

no, you're correct, I should just emphasize that this particular piece is about my long term dance professional dance partner, Aaron sweave. I know in case anyone is he's listening, and who we were both in relationships with other people. But he was my dance partner. So hence, hence there is that, hence, I'm framing it in that way. But there's definitely the possibility that you are dancing with a person in order to hold them. And the donor is the opportunity for that.

**Bret** 43:22

Well, the so I want to point to various different things that might be relevant to the space one, you describe the situation of young people being brought into the realm of Tango by their family, giving them lots of opportunity to see interactions that are you know, I think your description is marvelous, right? The idea of reciting somebodies romantic lines to whoever the director has cast in the opposing role is both informative about what romance might look like if the lines are well scripted. Right? And not personal because it's somebody who's been chosen by some process that wasn't the normal one. And so I guess there's a lot going on here. Let me just explore for a second. We know from lots of ethnological study that the way children typically learn about sex in, let's say, hunter gatherer cultures, is by virtue of observing it, because everybody's in very close quarters. And so children pretending to be asleep, for example, observing their parents, they actually learn something about what sex really looks like, right? Now, in the West. We don't have that we obscure normal sex and we provide high levels of access to scripted sex whose purpose is to get people to spend money basically porn right, supplants the sort of normal version, and replaces it with a very unrealistic and I would argue frequently toxic view of sexual interaction, which then misinformed people about what the objective is. I would argue that something like partner dancing, and your point about dances, if everybody is watching dances inherently public, you can do it privately. But most dancing takes place publicly, that's part of the point of it, is that it actually does inform people, especially young people who don't know about what interactions between the sexes might look like when they are harmonious and good. And that the absence of that tradition might therefore be very dangerous. And I would also point out, I was thinking this as I was reading a passage from your book, and then thinking it again, as you were reading the passage from the essay that you just read. That is not, in some ways, a tradition in which you can dance with other people's partners without threatening your own partner in some sense, the civilized alternative to something like polyamory, where people are constantly fending off demons of jealousy and betrayal, and which obviously threatens the well being of children, because multiple partners result in a lack of the structures that would cause people to invest properly in parenting, etc.

**Iona Italia** 46:39

Well, I'm okay with polyamory. I mean, I think it doesn't work for most people. But I think for some people, it can work. But I'm also okay with porn provided people are viewing it as fiction. So the problem is when people think that it is realistic, because it's extremely unrealistic. Especially, you know, a friend of mine told me that even when he was first watching porn at age 14, knowing something about the female anatomy, he thought this, you know, this woman is moaning and groaning, and she can't possibly be feeling anything at this moment. Because of, you know, what's happening. So I, I would less focus on that and more say that there is a kind of, it's always dangerous when we demonize people's natural feelings. And that one of the things that I think can be dangerous in the kind of Intel movement and the nofap movement and those kinds of things is that if you are it's a very short step from demonizing your sexual erotic feelings to demonizing the people who are arising those feelings. Even even if they're not, even deliberately or consciously arousing those feelings. And it's inherently unhealthy to get into a state of trying to blame people or blame ourselves or for feelings which are which cannot be helped. There's no good outcome to guilt over things that you cannot, you cannot help feeling. And so I think that the tango the idea for example, that you will be in a relationship and you will not find anybody else attractive or arising or you will never have any fantasy about anyone else is an inherently kind of unstable way to think about things. And it also I also really think that we need to, we should focus on people's actions and we should not try to second guess their thoughts and feelings and we should certainly not demonize their thoughts and feelings.

**Bret** 49:22

So I'm, I'm not sure where demonization is coming up here. Do you hear me demonizing someone? Oh, no, no,

**Iona Italia** 49:27

I don't. I just noticed it happening a lot. And I, I think, I guess that Tango does the opposite of that. So it's celebrates the kind, it celebrates attraction. It celebrates sensuality. And it celebrates the kind of just enjoyment of being in somebody else's arms. And it does so in this contained in this kind of realm. Tripoli safe, contained. And, and also very beautiful way. And I think it's just a more a healthier attitude towards sexuality than, than is normal in Western society or in orange many societies.

**Bret** 50:22

So I'm gonna, I'm gonna push back a little bit and I want to make sure that we at least know if we're disagreeing why we're disagreeing. So I am resolutely anti porn. I am not anti erotica in any way. But my sense is the distinguishing factor between erotica and porn is the motivation to produce it. If the motivation is economic, I'm against it, sex is too important. And the competition between producers of porn to get your attention inevitably pushes in the direction of extreme sex, which I think is, in general, not collaborative. So I'm hearing evermore stories from young female friends of mine about the fact that the dating landscape involves men who routinely want to choke them, or hurt them during sex. And this is a fringe activity. It has become mainstream, for obvious reasons, right? In an effort to compete. Porn producers have moved into the taboo because it's the only thing in which they can push a boundary. And I must say, I as the parent of children, who will soon enter the dating landscape, I'm horrified by the idea of what has been normalized and what they will therefore have to navigate. So I'm not in any way embarrassed about opposing porn. But I do think it's very important to say that's not prudishness. It's not the it's not an objection to the erotic. It's an objection to the market driven erotic.

**Iona Italia** 52:16

Yeah, I wasn't suggesting so when I was talking about the demonization novel sexual feelings, I was thinking about porn at all, let alone your take on porn. I was thinking about more about American society in general, for example. So one thing I noticed when I was teaching and also writing by Tango in Argentina versus when I was doing so in the US, is that in Argentina, people always felt even felt that I kind of pussyfooting around their erotic component of Tango, and that that should be always front and center and stressed very unabashedly. And Americans were horrified to even hear Tango and sex mentioned in the same sentence, it was like, but it's, it's, you know, it's this artistic and noble thing, and therefore there must be no tincture of kind of eroticism and sexuality involved in it, that will debase it in some way. So that's what I'm thinking of when I'm talking about the kind of demonization of people's natural feelings, versus the celebration of people's natural feelings in Tango.

**Bret** 53:35

Alright, so still, I want to get at this question of whether or not and again, this is not particular to tank. This is really about. So just to describe what I have seen, whether it's the norm or not, in Latin America, people go dancing on Friday and Saturday nights. The places that they go dancing tend to have a sequence of different genres. And I think they're typically played in the same order, right? So there'll be some reggae, they'll be some pop, there'll be some traditional marang gay salsa. And I guess my point is that there are certain a, it's a public place. B, let's suppose that you were, you know, a 19 year old, right? Not partnered, and the person you have a crush on is going to be at the dance on Friday. And last week, you didn't get up the nerve to ask them to dance, but this week, you're gonna and so the point is the regularity of showing up in this somewhat formalized space. That is public, right? It's like meeting for coffee in a public place. It's inherently safer than having someone come into your apartment. Right. There are rules about what happens on the dance floor. And if somebody violates those rules, somebody else is going to step up, they're going to be thrown out. Yeah. Right. So the point is, this gives a place to observe how others are doing the interaction. It gives a mechanism to test things out to test the waters before you dive in. And it is not polluted by the kind of fiction that you might find elsewhere. It's that fiction is replaced by the kind of formality of it. And in any case, my question is, is this solving a bunch of problems about how we navigate issues of sexuality, that having unsolved them by uninvented this modality, or making it so optional, that most American kids, for example, have no relationship with partner dancing whatsoever, to the extent that they're involved in dancing, it's either highly choreographed, you know, tick tock style stuff, or it's groups of kids bouncing up and down, which is all well and good. Yeah, it's all lovely. But it doesn't solve that it doesn't solve the problem of figuring out how you're going to mature into this ultimately, romantic and sexual landscape.

**Iona Italia** 56:19

Absolutely, I think that there are kind of two extremes which are very toxic for society when it comes to male female interactions. The one extreme is the Indian extreme, where men and women just young men and women just basically aren't permitted to interact with each other. And the upshot of that is, a lot of Indian men are completely clueless as to how to interact with women. And of course, a few of them are malevolent, but most of them are just totally awkward and clueless, and is therefore approaching women in a way, which is very off putting. And because all of their natural curiosity and desire has been squashed down by society, and there is no framework for it. And the tango scene where I taught in India in Puna, was just one of the most was one of the lovely experiences, and the Indians arrive, standing like 10 meters apart from each other. And then the end with everybody embracing everyone embracing each other, and with is very, like, healthy, and warm, and sort of natural and relaxed, interaction between everyone in the group. It's just beautiful to watch. So on the one hand, there is that extreme, the societies that are the most, the most strongly traditional in how they police relationships between young men and young women tend to also be the most dangerous societies. For women, Saudi Arabia is much more dangerous than Sweden. And the most misogynistic, and the ones in which there is most kind of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Because there's an all or nothing here, thing here, there's no sort of easy, productive kind, kind of gentle slope into this. And then on the other hand, there is the kind of this the hookup culture, Tinder, and all of all of those kinds of things that aren't there, again, that there is no intermediate stage, there's just you don't know each other at all, or you're just hanging out, quote, unquote, or you're having sex. And I think that, that it's, it's very unnatural to have nothing and then sex. It's much more natural to have this kind of this sort of realm of of the transitional realm, in a sense, which is one things Tango provides.

**Bret** 59:21

Yes, I I 100%. Agree. And I also my sense, and this is very hard to convey to people. I think the rate at which the expectations are changing is making it very hard to convey to the younger generations, what they have given up in exchange for what they've got. And so you know, because of loss aversion, people are very reluctant to give up things that they have. And so the idea of Tinder which might allow you to find a sex partner quickly, and you know, almost algorithmically, might seem like something you boy, you really don't want to give that up, but the question is What's the net effect? And my sense, is talking to large numbers of people, that young people are actually more liberated than ever sexually and more sexually miserable than ever. And so were I in that situation, my thought would be well, where did the misery come from? Certainly, it's if if it is true that people are becoming more miserable in this regard, then where are the factors that are causing that? And how do you get rid of them? And so anyway, I would put the, you know, the loss of a couple dancing tradition that predates my generation. So we didn't have that. And I didn't benefit from it. But having sort of tuned into what that tradition is, when I was in Latin America, it seems to me like it does solve problems that are undescribed. And that this is the basically we have adjusted to this fence issue, right? So for those who aren't aware of Chesterton's fence, Gk Chesterton proposed that if you happened on to a fence across a road that appeared to serve no purpose, and you wish to remove it, the right thing is not to say, Well, it seems to serve no purpose, therefore it can be removed, the right thing to do is to figure out what purpose it was erected for in order to determine whether it can be removed. And so with something like dance? The answer is, I don't think we ever did the analysis of what jobs it was doing. Nor is it easy to do completely, because so much of it is implicit and not not described anywhere. And so that's a long way of asking the question again, are we creating misery by getting rid of structures that might seem archaic, but in fact, we're probably solving problems that we didn't even know to worry about?

**Iona Italia** 1:01:57

I think there are a couple of aspects that I'd like to touch on that are relevant to this that are Tango specific. And one is that outside of in Argentina, many men dance tango, but outside of Argentina, dancing is a majority female activity, especially partner dancing. And one thing that I see happening, again, again, is this empathy gap between men and women, between young men and women, because young women often have the experience that they are constantly hit on, there become a kind of magnet for creeps, and hairdressers. And they feel just overwhelmed by approaches and offers and things. And young men feel that they can't get a partner at all, and can't get any attention at all. And you can see that in the statistics from Bumble and Tinder quite clearly. And dancing really equalizes things. Because although, although men often choose dance partners, partly for looks, that's almost never the case with women. Women could not in kind of 99% of cases, could not give a rat's ass what the guy looks like. They want to know can he dance. And if he can dance, they can have a very pleasurable experience with him. And as you can imagine, if you can have a pleasurable experience in one kind for the man, you're much more likely to be open to pleasurable experiences of other kinds, particularly when this is physical pleasure and enjoyment. procs that in the close proximity of, of another member of the opposite sex or nowadays can also be the same sex, your preferred sex. And fat, I think is a huge equalizer. So I always say I don't understand why more men don't dance tango, or don't learn to dance. And I know many men feel as though they can't dance quote, unquote. But again, not having learned to dance is not the same as not being able to dance. You wouldn't say I can't, I don't know I can't play the piano, or I can't make an omelet. And mean by that you would never be able to do the thing if you set your mind to it. And we do we learn a lot of things that require significant levels, levels of physical coordination and sensitivity. For example, many maybe most people learn to drive and you aren't born knowing how to drive and it's difficult at first. So I think that it would, it would help a great deal to just level that playing field a bit. And that would be beneficial to both sexes if more men danced. And the other thing is that one of the really nice traditions specific to tango is how we ask each other to dance. And actually, I'd like to read it a little paragraph describing it if that's okay. So we call this we call this tradition in Tango that Mirada Cabo Salle Mirada is a look and kavoussi was like a nod, literally. But it is basically a mutual icontact through which you determine whether you're going to dance with someone or not, so you don't have to kind of pluck up courage to ask, and you don't need to have one person asking and the other person responding.

**Bret** 1:06:03

So wait, before you read, I just want to point out that what you have just described is an analogue for the way one establishes a romantic relationship as well, right? Yeah, a lot is a lot is communicated before anything is communicated linguistically. And the difference between somebody who might even formally know that, but has no experience exchanging those kinds of messages, and somebody who does have experience is all the difference in the world. And so, again, it's like, we have a culture in which we have forgotten that you might need to learn how to be romantic. Yeah, and I would point out to your earlier point regarding knowing how to dance, that there is all the difference in the world between learning to dance when you're young, and it doesn't matter, it may feel like it matters, but nobody really remembers how you danced when you were 10 or 11, or 12. Right. Learning to dance as an adult, is mortifying because being observed and being clumsy, especially in that context, which is, you know, is performative and broadcasts a message is, the stakes are very high. And so you know, one message that it will reach nobody on this podcast, because I don't think we have any young viewers is learn to dance while you're young. And it doesn't matter, make those mistakes when you're young. And then you'll be laughing when you're older, and you have that skill under your belt.

**Iona Italia** 1:07:46

Well, there are ways to kind of get round it to create beginner groups of dancers. And one thing that works, for example, is or having an evening where you get together, and you all have drinks together, and the focus is on drinking and eating and you stand up and dance attender or two, over the course of the evening, it's a very low pressure way of easing your way in. And if everybody else is a beginner, then it you feel much less self conscious. And I think that although I've emphasize this steep initial learning curve in Tango, it takes probably a year for you to feel like you're dancing. Nevertheless, you can, most people can quite quickly find one person who enjoys dancing with them. And that's really all you need to start with. You don't need to be a popular dancer, maybe, you know, maybe 19 out of 20 women will not want to dance with you. But if one woman really enjoys dancing with you, that is a huge boost. And there you're you're already at that point, you're already a dancer, when one other person enjoys dancing with you, you have become a dancer,

**Bret** 1:09:06

okay? Again, though, again, you've pointed to a case you've just described an analogue for a healthy romantic life, right? You don't need everybody to want you, you need one person. Very, very tiring. But if you can get one person to invest repeatedly with you, right, and so you get better and better. That's, that's a success. So yeah. Anyway, my guess is and I do want you to get to the passage that you were going to read but my guess is that if we really analyzed dance from this perspective, what problems are being solved in this mill you that when they are solved by a dance tradition, show up less often in a psychologists office or an emergency room or who knows what? Right? That that would provide the strongest argument For partner dancing imaginable, that's, that's my guess.

**Iona Italia** 1:10:04

Yes, I'm not sure. Because there is also the fact that dancing, I mean, this is not to detract from what you're saying. But also, the purpose of dancing is joy. And that is also enough purpose enough in itself, this has kind of additional benefits.

**Bret** 1:10:22

I, I hate to do it. Now, here's the place where I'm gonna get accused of taking apart the flower and destroying its beauty. But joy, in every context is a proxy for value. And so the thing is, in that lovely way of putting it, yes, I think it's a deep truth, and it's one. So I am on a campaign to kill off the idea of recreation. And it's not because I don't want people to experience fun. But the problem is, if you pursue fun as if it were an objective in and of itself, then it removes the organizing principle of life. Whereas if you pursue things that are fun, because they are valuable, right, my guess is, Tango is valuable in 100 different ways. And that's why it's fun, right? And that's why it feels really good. And you point to, you know, dopamine levels spiking. The point is, those things are all messages internal to the body of a kind of achievement. And so, anyway, my my hope is not to reduce the amount of fun people have, but to get people to experience it as the reward for achieving something rather than as the objective.

**Iona Italia** 1:11:43

Yes, well, there certainly are two sorts of important things in life. And one is the appreciation. I mean, they're more than two, but I'm just schematize it like this right now. One is the kind of living in the moment to the appreciation of the moment of being fully present. And so that is the kind of joy element but the other element is meaning. And if you are just, if you are just kind of chasing the Hi, all of the time, which is something I've definitely experienced in in dancing. There's a kind of hollowness to it. Because once you have finished dancing, and you leave the piece to, you're not usually I mean, there are some there are videos if you're doing a performance or something. And I kind of treasure the videos of my performances, because at last, there's something tangible there. But in general, we don't we're not on video. In general, once the experience is over, it's over. And it can feel quite empty, because it lacks there's a satisfaction of doing but there isn't the satisfaction of having done. And the satisfaction of having done has to do with the feeling of contribution to something larger, and also of meaning of meaningfulness. That doesn't mean to say that the dancing isn't meaningful. But if you can place that enjoyment in a larger frame, then you get a more deep you get a much deeper satisfaction, because you add the meaning elements to the pure experience

**Bret** 1:13:39

are this is this is That's exactly right. And the idea the distinction between the completely ephemeral ecstatic feeling and the durable the ecstatic feeling that one can actually return to can recall that it you know, is constructive in some way. Seems to me an important, an important distinction, right? It's not like the ephemeral doesn't feel great, but it is. contactless?

**Iona Italia** 1:14:14

Yeah, yeah, it can leave you with a hollow feeling. Especially I think I mean, Tango can even the tango embrace can give you that sensation. It can feel like a simulacrum of affection. If you are dancing tango and you are single, or you have an unrequited unrequited or as yet unrequited crush on someone and you are dancing with that person, it can, it can give you a very, you can have a very painful sensation of it's of a reminder of what you're missing. It's the aspartame, of the sugar that you You're actually longing for Let me read you this little passage which is right in Roger cabassa, or description of them Roger kassu you have to be quick with your eyes. There are two methods, the scattershot approach in which you scan the room quickly to see whose gaze you can capture and the targeted kill in which you stare in template one chosen victim. In either case, at a crowded l basis to name for longer on a Sunday night. those first few bars of the tango are crucial if you want to catch a good dancers I only seconds into the first song of the tender. Many of the desirable men are already nodding at luckier women than you and striding purposely across the dance floor to the seats where the women sit demurely waiting for them. You need to shoot one down before the whole flock has flown. Because before long, the floor will be full of couples, a thicket of bodies blocking your line of sight. It's decidedly it's one of the tango orchestras and you know just whose long smooth strides would fit this music perfectly, but he is so far away in the opposite corner of the room. Luckily though, he is a master of the long range Kava sale. He turns catches your eye he smiles Cox's head to one side, you not in response, you are in luck. But as he approaches your table of doubt begins to form. Your neighbors eyes are glinting her legs, uncrossing her bottom, inching forward on the seat. But no, she is mistaken, you are the chosen one, he comes to stand right in front of you grinning broadly. You clamber clumsily past your neighbor's squash together thigh to thigh, and the two of you shuffle into position. And with the throng of couples out there to polystar sites the thing, you close your eyes and abandon yourself to the dance. So it's a very efficient means of inviting people to dance and unaccepting dances in a crowded room, where in the more traditional the longest people are seated at tables, and women on one side and men on the other. And then basically, you try to catch the eye of the person you want to dance with. If somebody catches your eye, and you don't want to dance with them, you just look, you just continue looking, surveying the room. If you do want to dance with them, you kind of hold eye contact, and then a little mind takes place. And the men come over and the men stand up and come over and pick up your seat. If once there's certain that you have both agree that you're going to dance with each other.

**Bret** 1:18:06

So that is a marvelous description. Right? I totally resonate with it. And I'm imagining though two versions of what you've just said, said in almost the identical terms, right? Imagine a mother explaining to a daughter, that this is how you win the affections of a man you're interested in or something like that. And the other the tango context that you describe it in one of these is absurd, right? I mean, not totally absurd. But the idea that you know, you're gonna sit your child down, and you're gonna say, Well, here's the thing, you know, affection is all very marvelous. And here's how you get some right, you have to, well, if the person is someone you're interested in, what then when they look at your direction, you hold their gaze, right? But if you don't, if you're not interested in them, then you look away, right? It's like, describing it as almost preposterous. Yes. On the other hand, dance, the environment of dance is somewhat formalized, it is public, and therefore safer. The stakes are reduced because you're not playing with your heart You're playing with the next few minutes and, you know, a lost opportunity, or perhaps a discovered opportunity. But in any case, this is what you want, right? It's it is an environment it is not a zero stakes environment. Like a video game where everything has been I realized that modern video games aren't exactly zero stakes anymore, but but nonetheless, it is an environment in which the most important features of life are played out. In a safer, more explicit form, and that allows the learning process to work. And so I guess what, what I'm really saying is, I think, in cultures where this has been lost, what we are seeing is like romantic illiteracy, the tools that you might use to get good at this most important game are gone. And nobody has told you here's the problem, there's an instruction manual, you haven't seen it, you don't know the language it's written in. And until you figure out what these things are, you're actually going to make yourself miserable, because you're wired to find the product of that game. Very important. And if you can't access, it's like, you're living in a world in which, you know, carpentry is the thing in which all value is rendered. And you don't know the first thing about how to handle a saw.

**Iona Italia** 1:21:02

Yeah, yeah.

**Bret** 1:21:04

I mean, I I don't I don't know if you I don't know if you agree or disagree. I don't want to push you into this perspective. But that is what I in hearing your description. That's what I'm getting.

**Iona Italia** 1:21:13

Huh? Well, you know, there are there are parallels and romance for example, no one has ever asked permission to kiss me. How do you kiss someone for the first time? Well, you both live with each other, you move little closer, you see the other person also moves a little closer, if they do you lean in more, if they lean in more, that then it happens. So you are doing very similar things. So the things that you do when you're dancing, which is when you're dancing, you focus quite intently on the micro movements of the other person's body, you read those movements, and you respond. I mean, in a once your practice dancer, you responded very unconscious wait feels like as they're moving in this way, the easiest way for me to move, it's excellent, I'm just going to do it. And what it is about attempt attentiveness, it forces a an attentiveness to the other person's physical signals.

**Bret** 1:22:17

Right? And let's take your example. There's something I find it completely jarring to hear young people talk about issues of consent. Because while issues of consent are vital, and violations of consent are very serious. The idea that consent is inherently about saying, Do you want this Yes, I want this is preposterous in a normal sexual context. In other words, you know, there is built into us the ability to navigate these issues, these very high stakes issues in a way that isn't a total turnoff. And the so you have in this case, a very clear indication of what is lost and what is gained. If you substitute, if you substitute a culture in which you can navigate issues of consent in the way humans have traditionally done so. And what you get for it is the ability to interact sexually with people you haven't just met. Right? But how do you have to interact in a fully explicit mechanistic way? Because otherwise, how would you know what the person was thinking? Right? So anyway, I see in this, in your example, exactly, you know, if dance teaches you to interact with a partner without having to say, Alright, I'm gonna move to the left now, you know, then the substitution of that as a culture, or the substitution for that is a culture in which everything is done by air traffic control, and there's no flow or natural rhythm or logic to it.

**Iona Italia** 1:24:05

I think one of the problems with consensus, that kind of idea of that it's somehow contractual. And that, therefore, if I say, okay, yes, I consent to having sex. It's it, it feels like a really weird an impossible thing to consent to phrase in those terms. I don't mean one cannot consent to having sex. What I mean is that what i what i consent to is, beginning this experience and seeing where it takes us, and maybe it takes us in the direction that I no longer do not want to go. And it's if the person is at all sensitive, it's very easy to signal that without words, but you can also use words if you need to. But what you can't do is give them some kind of blanket guarantee in advance.

**Bret** 1:24:56

Right? Yes, you you're in some sense The natural pattern is you're consenting to the next instant. Yeah. And then seeing what how many instances can we go in a row where we're both into going further, right? So you know if that's the natural pattern, and the natural way of figuring out is that your partner's giving off signals and those signals at the point that they are no longer into it aren't ones you should be reading, then the whole idea of substituting explicit language is preposterous on its face. And you

**Iona Italia** 1:25:33

can't ask every you can't offer, you can't offer verbal consent every two seconds. I mean, that doesn't mean that consent isn't ongoing as you say, if your partner says stop, and you don't stop at that moment, it ceases to be consensual it becomes rape. But nevertheless, you don't it's impossible to give a kind of like a cricket commentary or something every 30 seconds. Okay, with this scenario, okay with that, I mean, I think there are sexier and less sexy ways to ask for consent. And I would, there's a very beautiful scene in the Netflix series salvation, which, if anybody enjoys listening to this, enjoy sci fi highly recommended. And there is a just extremely erotic scene there, which involves verbal, asking verbally for consent. So there are kind of ways to do it. You can also there can also be a cut kind of integrated into dirty talk like about you like this. Do you like that? Are you into this? You know, you can you can imagine a way in which this could be done. But it can't be contractual, I mean, as a requirement, it doesn't work.

**Bret** 1:26:57

Yeah. And there obviously, is an ancient, non formal mechanism in play. And the question is, if you have sidelined the ancient mechanism, why did you do it? What did you get in exchange, and in this case, anyway, I have concerns as a parent of kids who are going to have to navigate this landscape that what was surrendered, was very valuable in what was gained is meager. But in any case, Alright, so what more, What more should people understand about this landscape? Maybe you have a sense of what people don't get and what they might

**Iona Italia** 1:27:42

write. I think that one thing I've noticed, being a tango dancer is how wedded people are to their preconceptions about things. So many people have a very fixed preconception of Tango that is based on stage Tango, which is a very small proportion of Tango. And they are imagining women in in skirts slit right up to the Cuadras with like, fishnet tights on and spike heels and really stern expressions and this sort of full passion, which I really hate. This kind of angry looking, over dramatized, kitschy thing. And they're also imagining a kind of quick, quick, slow, slow, quick, quick music. And many of them are also imagining kind of European ballroom Tango, which there are many different legitimate forms of Tango. But I'm just going to come out and say, I think, I think almost everybody who dances Argentine Tango would agree with me ballroom Tango is not Tango. It's a totally bastardized form.

**Bret** 1:29:04

So just help me understand is the distinction that is it ballroom Tango is choreographed?

**Iona Italia** 1:29:18

No. Yes or no. So ballroom Tango, Tango is is generally fully improvised and by that I don't just mean there's no choreography I mean, there's no basic step. So for example, in in ballroom Waltz, the basic step is take a step diagonally backwards or forwards if you're the man to the side and close and then go diagonally forwards to decide and close. So I knew do various other little figures so sets that patterns and you kind of glue it together with that basic step. I don't actually know the base Six Seven ballroom Tango. But ballroom Tango also has a basic step like that. The basic step in Tango is only walking, there isn't a bit of a kind of there is a basic pattern that you keep going back to and repeating that glues it all together. Also, the music is much more sophisticated than ballroom dance music, which is all smoothed out and has the has these kind of really annoying to me annoying recurrent rhythms. Whereas Tango has a more operatic sound, it's more melodic. And also in ballroom Tango, you lean back at the waist, anywhere, all these fancy costumes, whereas we danced normal clothes, you have to be able to move but in in whatever clothes are comfortable for moving, and we lean in towards each other and have the upper body close together. And it's not. It's surprising that even when I tell people, no, you're misunderstanding, that's not how it looks when most people dance tango, here's a video. Or if I say that's actually not how Tango music sounds here, some actual Tango music, face still seem really reluctant to look at the video or listen to the music, and they kind of prefer to stay with their stereotype view. And that's really surprising to me. And I'm sure it's not unique to tango. So it's one thing I've learned about human beings.

**Bret** 1:31:48

Yeah, I think it's a it's an almost universal reaction that and you know, I, if I can give a defense of it, there is this problem you you have a model of how things work. And then you discover that some element of the model isn't right. And if you unhook that element, you don't know what else comes crashing down. And so there's, you know, for somebody who is going to be involved in Tango, it's very important that they get past that for somebody who thinks about Tango every, you know, eight months. Yes, yeah, it may be that holding on to the wrong idea of what Tango is built of is safer than unhooking it and you know, finding out that something else in the model of I mean, it's hard to imagine what what would be stacked on Tango, but, but I know that scientifically speaking, you can learn something, and you sort of need to hold on to it. And the fact that it may be imprecise, may not be reason enough to throw it out. But in any case, yes, I guess I am now moved to wonder whether or not I've seen Tango as you're describing it, because I've certainly seen the more famous ballroom version of it. And I mean, maybe that's part of when I described at the top of the podcast, my reaction to tango wasn't something I needed to know anything about, because the likelihood of my being involved in it was effectively zero. That's predicated on the famous and misleading version. I think so.

**Iona Italia** 1:33:28

Yeah. I think if you see social Tango dance, as most people dancing, as opposed to the ballroom version, it will be much more compelling, will be much more inviting to you. And maybe we can put a link or two in the show notes.

**Bret** 1:33:48

Sure. And is there a search term that somebody who's curious to see what Tango really looks like a search term that would be likely to bring up the right version rather than the the more famous wrongdoer? Yes, so

**Iona Italia** 1:34:02

I would say you can look for Carlitos and noelia. So if you look for that couple, then you will find proper Tango. And also, if you actually search my name and Tango, I have quite a lot of performances also that are definitely not voluntary.

**Bret** 1:34:22

Great. All right. And they're on YouTube.

**Iona Italia** 1:34:26

They're on YouTube. Yes, excellent. I not really, I have a particularly particularly kind of favorite performance, which I'll give you a link to so people can click on that. And we're also dancing to. It's a very soft romantic and smooth muse, our music and it's quite a simple dance. I would say that don't feel that you cannot dance Just because you have not learned To dance, and it will be a little difficult at first, but it's very much worth investing the time, especially for men. If you're single man, and you're not dancing tango, what are you doing? What are you doing? Yeah, Bumble and start dancing tango instead. Or but this is this

**Bret** 1:35:19

is wise advice. And I'm thinking about the question you asked, which is why don't men realize how much men who are frustrated by their inability to find a partner? Why don't they realize that this would be an excellent mechanism to greatly enhance their their value in the mating and dating world? Yeah. And I think part of the answer does have to do, and I'm not really sure why males are inherently so much more mortified to dance publicly than females, it seems inherent, and from very early on, that women liked to dance, and they get good at it so that they're not embarrassed by dancing. And it only gets harder for men, because the older you are, as a novice, the more mortifying it is, which makes it harder to start, right. sort of the opposite of quitting smoking. It's very hard to stop smoking, it's very hard to start dancing, you know, at least as a male. But yes, it is. It's advice. It would be great if young men took and sounds like, again, I learned a lot in your your book about various issues, including the sex ratio problem in Tango, and its its effects on the culture. It would be better for everybody if it'd be better for everybody, except the men who are in high demand. Really?

**Iona Italia** 1:36:49

Never be great for them, they would have even more choice, they would love it. Oh, no, sorry. No, you're right. I just had a blonde moment there.

**Bret** 1:37:00

All right. All right. So is there any other topic that you're hoping that we will get to Hi,

**Iona Italia** 1:37:07

just wanted to say a few words about area before

**Bret** 1:37:10

we and I was hoping that you would

**Iona Italia** 1:37:13

marvelous. So I am taking over the editor editorship of area magazine, I think by the time this airs, I will have already taken it over. From Helen pluck rose, who I think many of your viewers are, and listeners are familiar with. And how because Helen has funded a new organization called counterweight, which is a kind of advocacy organization for people who are in trouble because they refuse to kowtow to the work woke orthodoxy at work. So they're being forced through diverse mandatory diversity training, or they're being fired or threatened with firing for frivolous reasons to do with their refusal to be politically correct. And so Helen no longer has time to run Aereo. So she is giving it over to me. And I'm very excited about it. I think Aereo is really important. Because on the one hand, we are unafraid to criticize, work orthodoxy, and we're unafraid to throw those sacred cows onto the barbecue and make biscuits. But at the same time, it's not. It's not, we're not hyperbolic, we're not anecdotal. We are not inflammatory. And our aim is not to not to demonize or necessarily ridicule people who are into critical social justice, but to get them on side, issue by issue, most importantly, with free speech. So our aim is persuasion, not kind of posturing. And I don't think there are enough magazines like that in the ecosystem. But arios finances are in a terrible state, because Helen absolutely hates to ask for money. And she is also was running the magazine pro bono, because she has other sources of income. So she was just basically doing it for free. I have no qualms about asking for money, and I also am not in a position to do pro bono. So in order to pay me a salary, because I will be running the magazine single handedly and it's more than a full time job and pay our writers and I would, you know, in the long run, I'd like to pay them more because we're definitely not paying them what they deserve for the kind of high quality content they're producing. And to just Keep the magazine basically our feisty little magazine vibrant and sustainable and alive and out there. I'm going to have to just turn areas finances around. So I would really urge people to, if they possibly can to support us to join our Patreon, or join our subscribe star. Or you can also make a regular PayPal donation if you don't want to use either of those. Or if you can't do that, encourage other people to do it. Spread the word. And if you know of any wealthy people who might be interested in funding us in a more major way, I am looking for donors and funders, please send them my way. And the first thing that will happen when I take over is it's going to be an inaugural free speech issue. So for a week, or 10 days, all the articles are going to be on free speech from different points of view. So please also, please spread the word far and wide, this is a blood drive, we need your transfusions.

**Bret** 1:41:08

So if I can just add to that, the danger, the number of magazines that are capable of doing what aureo does is so tiny already, and if that number hits zero, the crisis will become suddenly vastly worse, as hard as that is to imagine. And so aureo is marvelous, it has done an excellent job, we now know that it is in a financial situation where money matters at this moment, a great deal. So the very survival. And so I hope people will check out aureo if you're not familiar with it, probably if you go there, you will discover that you have read articles from aureo and enjoyed them and been enlightened by them. And so anyway, yes, a very worthy cause. And I certainly wish you the best of luck in financially bringing aureo into a strong position. And in managing the magazine.

**Iona Italia** 1:42:11

Thank you. And Please also check out we have a podcast, which is it's paywalls. But it's available free to podcast patrons and Aereo patrons called to for tea. And you can find the shorter versions online so you can listen to one of those shorter versions and see whether you like the podcast, and that might also be a reason to subscribe. And Heather has been on the podcast and has also written for you more than once. So

**Bret** 1:42:39

this is true. Also, we should have you you have your copy of your book there.

**Iona Italia** 1:42:48

Yes. Okay, my book. That's me on your world. That's me on the cover.

**Bret** 1:42:56

Because you are on the cover dancing tango, do

**Iona Italia** 1:43:01

it it's so it's published by small independent press called no longer press, but it's also on Amazon. And there is an E book of it's in two parts and there is an E book of the first part. And there is also these two, there's a physical

**Bret** 1:43:23

Kindle version of both parts

**Iona Italia** 1:43:25

of Oh, there is no Yes, yeah, there's a Kindle version of both parts. And I also have some dance themed fictions which I am making currently into audiobooks. So please watch this space.

**Bret** 1:43:40

Marvelous. And I would say that the book is well worth the read. Even if you don't intend to dance tango, it is deeply philosophical. And I found it fascinating. Each section I read was well worth the investment. So anywhere I suggest looking into it. I think you'd be surprised at how Richard world it is and how wonderful a job you have done. I own it in unearthing what is there.

**Iona Italia** 1:44:06

Thank you. Thank you so much. All right. Well,

**Bret** 1:44:09

thanks for joining me on dark horse and I look forward to dancing tango with you when you come to Portland.

**Iona Italia** 1:44:17

Yes, that's not a threat. It's a promise.

**Bret** 1:44:21

All right, be well everyone. Bye bye.