John Wood Jr. of Better Angels \_ Bret Weinstein's DarkHorse ...

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**SPEAKERS**

Bret, John Wood Jr

**Bret** 00:00

Hey folks, welcome to the Dark Horse Podcast. I am Brett Weinstein, your host, and I am sitting with john wood Jr, who is national leader and media director at better angels. JOHN, welcome to the Dark Horse podcast.

**John Wood Jr** 00:13

It's great to be back, Brett. Well, I say great to be back. Of course, folks will not know that I am back at this point, they will not know I've already started us on a tangent. Have you have

**Bret** 00:23

started us on a tangent? Yes, we, in fact, did do a prior conversation, which I regarded as absolutely excellent. But it was our first conversation in the studio. And the studio did not function up to par. So I'm sad to say that that footage is not rescue doable. Um, hopefully this conversation will be just as good, it's going to be hard, but but I'm hoping we can get there.

**John Wood Jr** 00:48

I feel like this was that was probably my fault. Somehow, in a grand karmic sort of sense. I have a reputation, which my wife will happily corroborate for you of being the person around which technology tends to malfunction for no particular reason at all. So you know, I put on a watch, it tends to break for no discernible reason within two or three months. Hence, I do not wear one internet connection seem to slow when I'm around interesting times. Yeah, I mean, you know, this, this is this may be some strange kind of, you know, static electrical signal I'm giving off. Or it might just be a function of the fact that for whatever reason, Murphy's Law suggests that because I need to use technology, so consistent meaning in my life, I cannot ever get it to actually work well, because I'm destined to be frustrated in that relationship, you know, in an everlasting way, and to frustrate other people around me in the process. So no particular reason for it I can come up with but feel free to blame me very interested for explanation. Murphy's

**Bret** 01:52

Law has never worked for me, which I find interesting. technology isn't pretty good. I'm fine around tech. So probably that was you and not me. I find mirrors don't work they break upon you. So I don't know what that's about. Exactly. But it's

**John Wood Jr** 02:06

either an aesthetic issue or an honesty issue. Yeah,

**Bret** 02:10

it's one of the two or both actually possibly could be Yeah. All right. Well, let's talk a little bit about, we could talk about better angels, or we could start with some of the larger, larger issues. Maybe tell us a little bit about better angels, right?

**John Wood Jr** 02:25

Yep. So better angels, is the nation's largest bipartisan grassroots organization dedicated to the work of political depolarization. In the United States. And we're a volunteer group, we have 1000s of members dues paying members across the country now have about 1000 volunteers scattered across all 50 states. And better angels is a group that is best known or at least best covered in the mainstream media for a program that we have called a red blue workshop where we take small groups of folks from the right and from the left reds and blues, as we say in the house, bring them together for a session in which they don't argue and debate about politics, per se. But rather, we give each side the opportunity through moderated exercises to speak from the vantage point of their own, have their own personal or lived experience, so to speak, in terms of why they see politics the way they do. So folks, we literally apply marriage counseling techniques to political conversations, which, you know, seems probably like an appropriate metaphor for what's needed in the context of our political dialogue today, but what folks are, what but what the vision of better angels increasingly has become, is one in which we seek to take the values and the culture of interaction that is established in these sorts of gatherings. And to use that as sort of an initial peak experience whereby we are able to route people into participating in bipartisan structures in their own communities, excuse me, that allow them to pursue advocacy over issues and, and policies and community projects that reach a certain consensus within a local better angels Alliance is what we call them, basically local better angels chapter to empower them to work collaboratively in local communities. And in building off of that, to highlight this work through a digital media presence that's meant to sort of take the norms established in these local relationships and scale that up into a national narrative. And so our larger effort is to essentially is to essentially spearhead a heterodox movement in this country that is able to sort of turn back the turn back the tide in terms of our increasingly fractured narrative understanding of America's being split between two tribes, we're trying to consolidate the notion that there is sort of a unifying bedrock of values and spirit that exists within the American people to stabilize what is currently very unstable social and political climate in the United States. So

**Bret** 05:15

I do think that there is a heterodox movement. I haven't heard anybody else point to it that way. Obviously, heterodox Academy is spearheading that sort of effort. And Jonathan Hite is on our board of directors, better angels, but I didn't know that it doesn't surprise me at all that he would be. And of course, Peter Bogosian and James Lindsay's book about having impossible conversations has just emerged. And I can't tell you how many times a week I hear somebody talking about either their despair about the difficulty of having conversations about things that matter or the hopefulness that they see and the fact that some of us are managing to do it. So yes, it's, it's a moment when this idea is ripe. And and the place that you and I first encountered each other, better angels, which frankly, I had never heard of, before, you guys contacted us, had Heather and me in a Was it a debate? Is that what we called it or what? Well,

**John Wood Jr** 06:12

okay, so going back in time a little bit, actually, that was not a better angels of that, that was a bridging our divide event.

**Bret** 06:21

So I became a better angels, because you were the moderator.

**John Wood Jr** 06:25

I was the moderator. Right? And so Shiloh reached out to me for that, to moderate that conversation with you have her and a couple of other individuals representing sort of a social justice perspective, I think,

**Bret** 06:39

you saying that I was on the social injustice side, or on the social injustice. Interesting. You're not the first person that wrote that allegation?

**John Wood Jr** 06:47

But um, yeah. So I Shiloh reached out to me because of my position, better angels to moderate that conversation. That's what brought us into the same sort of orbit. But of course, I was very familiar with you. And Heather, because I had been tracking the intellectual dark web space as its, and actually at that time, I'm not even sure that phrase was even invoke, but it was evident that they there was a space forming that at that point, I think, and so in any event, that's how we wound up finding our way into the same universe. All right.

**Bret** 07:18

Well, my apologies to Shiloh and his organization for conflating you all with them. But in any case, working in the same working in the same spirit, say in the same spirit, and I think there are a lot of us, fellow travelers looking to bridge divides. Yeah, various kinds. So in any case, I'm glad that it didn't bring us into contact. Yeah. But when you moderated that debate, I was simply very impressed by not only how deeply you understood the issues, but how deeply you seem to understand people. And that, you know, that I can't recall if it was portrayed as a debate. But the fact is, it was the sort of pairing that might have resulted in a contentious discussion, but the way you managed it, I think we were productive. But there was no rancor of any kind. And that's, you know, the way I think, those of us who understand what this heterodox movement is about,

**John Wood Jr** 08:14

prefer it. Right? Yeah. Yeah. I mean, there's, I think there's, there's, there's kind of a starting point assumption that I think we want to bring to communication with people on a on the other side of a particular issue or a broader worldview that has the potential to sort of not only allow for civil discourse to take place, but to allow for an actual kind of felt bond of connection to be established, at least with respect to a common recognition of the human dignity that exists on either side of the divide. And that's just the assumption going into an exchange like that, that there is some humanity and that other individual to be found. And so this actually, it brings me to something I'm interested in exploring with you a little bit because I sort of perceive there as being kind of a broader sort of heterodox culture percolating, you know, in the United States and certainly beyond that. And I've been very interested in the sorts of very empirically grounded conversations that have taken place, you know, centering around yourself and Sam Harris and other folks in the ITW space and so forth. It seems like in one area, there's this focus on the power of reason to sort of transcend our tribal divides, which I think is which I think is real in the space in which I've been working better angels and the sort of, you know, small constellation of organizations like living room conversations and bridge Alliance and media sites like All sides and so forth, there's been this emphasis on kind of empathy as the starting point for constructive dialogue. And this also therefore unfolds in a very heterodox sort of sort of place. Because in our programs, better angels, were focused on bringing people into relationship with each other. And so it seems to me that, in in these two sorts of somewhat parallel kinds of spaces, there's a common concern with wanting to bring people together across these divides. But sometimes I, I listened to folks having these conversations in the digital zone. And it seems to, there seems to be recognition of the fact that you have to speak to the emotional center of another person to be able to, to move them. And yet the focus sometimes tends to be on the rash, the power of the rational exchange, to move people into, you know, into alignment across tribal divisions. And I wonder, in the kind of intellectual darkweb space, if there isn't a sense sometimes that there's, there's, there's limits to the efficacy of focusing on the rational component, but it's succeeded in sparking a broad audience. Whereas in our, in our space, the depolarization sort of zone, we focus on empathy, and it seems to be effective in establishing Close, close, intimate bonds of communication. But it doesn't seem to be a theme that has kind of translated towards a broad kind of popular following, you know, we tend to be a constellation of small organizations doing deep work that isn't, that hasn't quite scaled. And so that's, that's my focus is on figuring out, you know, how do we get the best of both these worlds? But I want to park that really quick just to see if if one, if, if you see something of a little bit of a divide on each side of that, I don't know how much of a window you have into the space that I work in on a consistent basis. But if you make anything of that differentiation,

**Bret** 12:01

oh, indeed. Okay. So you have done what you typically do, which is you have, you know, introduced when you present as a small point that might be discussed. And of course, what you've done is you've opened a topic that could easily occupy us for 10 hours. I don't know, but there's a lot of there. I

**John Wood Jr** 12:20

beg your indulgence? No, no, I

**Bret** 12:21

like it. I'm, I'm quite pleased by this topic. And I've done a lot of thinking about it for various reasons. You know, one thing I would say is, I sometimes hear people talk about the humanity of the person on the other side. And I also heard you say something that I've never heard anybody talk about, which is the How did you put it the sense of camaraderie that arises when you do manage to cross one of these guys? Which I feel very personal? Yes. And I'm not sure everybody does. I can hope so. But I know that I feel a little bit challenged when somebody is out of reach. Yeah. And that if I succeed in crossing the divide, it feels very good. And not just like a victory, it feels like my circle has broadened in some way that is, is rewarding. But I do think that there's a caveat here. And I think the caveat will help us get where you're suggesting we need to go, which has something to do with the admixture between the rational and the empathic, and emotional. So the caveat is, not everybody on the other side is reachable. And while it is sort of tempting to go into the realm of well, you know, there are sociopaths out there who aren't really attempting to accomplish the same thing, I think we can stay out of the realm of guessing what the motivation is. And we can just simply say, if somebody is not interacting in good faith, you cannot count on crossing that divide, no matter what toolkit you choose, right? They will pull a fast one in analytical space, and they will abuse your trust and all sorts of things. So what I like to do is figure out whether or not the person on the other side strikes me as interested, would they be interested in in discovering that they are incorrect about something? For example? Are they interested in bridging a divide? If they are incorrect in their assumptions about me? Would they be pleased to discover that things aren't as bad as they imagine? Or would they be disturbed by that discovery? Because it makes what they're doing harder? So if we can put aside people acting in bad faith, and we can say there are lots of reasons to disagree, that don't have to do with bad faith? And those are the divides that are a bridgeable and be worth attempting to do. And then the question is, well, is rationality the tool and certainly for some people, it's the way in is it emotionality and empathy. For other people, it's the way and for some of us, it's a bit of each, right? It's an exploration and to the extent that you detect somebody on their side isn't trigged in interested in making progress, then you can sort of go step by step sort of lead, climb, you know, take the lead, they take the lead that sort of thing. And as for, you know somebody in your position where this is now, your job, where are you you're attempting to lead people into these conversations where they do discover the humanity on the other side, and maybe discover that the other side has a piece of the truth that they didn't have. What should that admixture be? It'd be 6040, rational empathy. I don't know. Last thing I will say before I turn it back over to you is, I have a concept in a related space. It's not exactly the question you asked. But I have been saying that in a policy context, in order to make a compassionate policy, you have to have a dispassionate discussion. This is counterintuitive to people, but I'm quite convinced of it. So in other words, if you want a policy that addresses homelessness in a compassionate way, then you have to do a game theoretic analysis, which is not an emotional field good analysis at all right? You have to understand why it is that a city, for example, can't solve this problem, right? So what I am trying if there's one grain of truth at the bottom that I would like people to walk away with it's Do not assume that because you hear somebody engaged in a dispassionate analysis that they are deaf to suffering, for example, it may be just the opposite. It may be that they take suffering seriously enough, that they're willing to go dispassionately at the problem and see if they can address it.

**John Wood Jr** 16:42

Yeah, right. Well, I agree with that. And I think that one of the fundamental challenges of policymaking and policy conversations is the fact that and actually, this goes beyond policy, this just goes to other parts of our lives, where in order to view a complex problem and all of its dimensions, you literally need to maintain the space of mental focus, to see it clearly over a sustained period of attention, so as to imagine the ways in which a certain issue might be impacted. And the emotional reactions that we have to particularly the human substance of a wicked social problem is such that we can feel ourselves stirred towards solutions that might be socially gratifying for whatever reason, or emotionally or symbolically gratifying, right? But that don't actually get to the heart of a particular problem. And so, I mean, I think one potential example of that might be the the wall idea on the southern border, I don't think we're ever gonna get that wall. But even so, and I also don't think that the proposal of it was really a serious policy begin with, but that's just the point, though, that our politics tends to lend itself towards symbolic gestures meant to appeal to our need to see something done. And actually on the left, I think that, you know, I mean, I'm sure folks would push back a bit on this. But I think that some of our some gun control measures that people have proposed are also similarly more symbolic than they are serious efforts at impacting a deep, deep problem. And so it's funny because you have this mismatch between the emotional vigor with which we express our concern for a problem. But with a much more subtle, but potentially corresponding lack of intellectual seriousness with which we express our concern for the substance of a particular problem, you know, because just just just to your point, a person who is particularly concerned with actually impacting a problem as opposed to signaling concern for a problem is a person who's going to is a person who's going to control him or herself enough to be able to look the problem and it's nuanced dimensions, and communicate effectively in terms of you know, what a serious resolution to an issue might be. But this draws us right back to the starting point here, which is essentially, how do we create the conditions in which we are able to govern effectively and in a way to where we're able to, to impact problems that are significant? And the answer to that has to be I think, predicated upon a certain level of social solidarity. Which brings us to this question of, well, how do we accomplish that if we're fractured into our tribes and so forth, one thing is stacked upon the other, right, we cannot govern in a stable way unless our social fabric is is firmed up. Right? And so, you know, come back to your question of what is the admixture of reason and empathy and so forth, to be employed there and, and I have more to say about that, obviously, but I'll just note that I frequently for the most common Criticism I find myself getting is that when I talk about the need to the need to see the dignity in the other human being to go into a conversation with good faith and to understand the emotional origins have another point of view. I frequently get accused of not saying anything at all, in saying that, you know, because I think that for some people, there's a sense that substance in any argument has to be sort of, you have to be able to it has to translate to quantifiable terms, you know, yep. And, and yet, I think that, that virtue and aspects of character that animate the sorts of good faith conversations and, and, and sober analyses that we're striving for, are qualities that are observable, definable, describable, but not necessarily quantifiable and obvious, empirical sort of, sort of terminology. And the reason I introduce that frame here is just to say that, you know, we look at, I've come to sort of appreciate a little bit more the importance of a lofty kind of political and social language of idealism, particularly in the age of President Trump, I have to say, where we've seen the absence of much of that.

**John Wood Jr** 21:32

And that is, because a lot of what sounds like hollow substance and political rhetoric in the past, has really been from, you know, Lincoln, to Kennedy, to Reagan, to Obama, you know, take your pick of, you know, impactful American statesman has really been the language that has sort of affirmed or reaffirmed the kind of transcendent substance of, you know, the moral values and idealism that kind of holds the social fabric country of, of the social fabric of a community and have a nation together. So this idea that we believe in Liberty, we believe in equality, we believe in justice before the law. And you might weave into that the substance of the nonviolent tradition, we believe in loving, loving our enemies, loving the oppressors. If you will, you might listen to that language and say, Well, this guy's talking about much enough. And, you know, because what does that translate into? And

**Bret** 22:30

her to me to think that because I agree with you,

**John Wood Jr** 22:34

not not, not you, but I mean, but but this is

**Bret** 22:37

my point, you and I are able to have a productive discussion, in part because neither of us would think to make that leap. But I agree you're pointing to something really important. People do make this assumption that either it's in the, the analytic content of a statement, or it isn't. Right. Right. And that, yeah, and that's just not it's not the case,

**John Wood Jr** 22:56

right. But there's something but I understand the difficulty people have with that, because it is something that is sort of axiomatic in in an effective interior moral framework, right? You sort of have to, I mean, how do I demonstrate I can demonstrate to you in practical terms, why it is efficacious to love your enemy, I can say that look, in loving your enemy, you do, you do two things right off the bat. It's just borrow from the substance of Dr. King's philosophy, you know, love for the opponent has the potential, at least, to touch the better angels of that individual's nature, you, you are able to redefine yourself potentially in that person's eyes as a person who is not a threat, or who at least is not trying to be a threat. And in so doing, give yourself you open up whatever window might be there to speak to that person's conscience. And at the same time, even if that person's window of conscience is so small, that as you said, some people just are not interested in, in being available to that kind of a connection. At the very least, you're able to unshackle yourself from the from the albatross of interior animosity or hatred towards your opponent because that is a psychologically debilitating thing to carry around with yourself as so many people and activists in our country do. But in me making that practical case for love and empathy as a starting point for our interactions with people on the other side, whatever side you're starting from. That is not necessarily sufficient. means by which I make, I can communicate how it is you establish that starting point to begin with, right? So in other words, I can tell you, it's a good idea for you to love your enemy. That doesn't mean you're going to feel it

**Bret** 24:45

when it's not a good idea. It depends on your enemy. Well, but I know what you're saying. I know exactly what you're saying. But the reason that this falls on deaf ears, I believe is because when you say that many people have the experience of some enemy with whom that will not work. Sure. And so I believe it needs an asterisk on it in order to win over those people who have years to hear this point, but have some experience that tells them Oh, you can't do that every time because you'll end up you will sow the seeds of your own undoing, if you attempt it.

**John Wood Jr** 25:17

Right. Yeah, I think that the Well, first of all, I agree with that point. Because it's, it is the pushback that we frequently get, which is, well, what are the limits of this? Right? Because there's got to be there's got to be a limit, ultimately, because some people just unavailable to that sort of sort of love or sympathy or, or what have you.

**Bret** 25:42

So again, I know we're not disagreeing. But I don't think it's a limit. It's not like, you know, love your enemy, but only so far. And in fact, the word love implies, not that at all right? That's right. What it means is there's a boundary, it works within some zone pending certain assumptions that we're not going to be able to specify with precision, you should engage in this at least as a start. And if what comes back doesn't match, then, you know, we've learned from Game Theory, actually that a benevolent starting point tends to show the same seat on the other side. But if what comes back is defection, then that tells you Well, I don't want to be a sucker in this interaction. But anyway, let's put that aside for the moment. You have unfortunately done it again, to soliloquy is in a row and you have introduced another dozen hours of stuff that we might talk about, I don't want it to get all lost. So if I can go back and just point to a couple things that I heard you say, you talked about love and a common starting point, what you didn't talk about which I have a feeling belongs in that very same conversation is patriotism. Yes. Which I would argue has a for people on the left, it is a very uncomfortable connection to love. But that is because the discussion about patriotism has been polluted with nationalism, many people regard them as synonyms, I regard them as essentially antonyms,

**John Wood Jr** 27:07

even prior to Trump. I think there was that sense of the

**Bret** 27:11

left. Sure. And so you know, those on the Right tend to see those on the left is unpatriotic because the left has an arm's length relationship to patriotism at best, but patriotism really is the willingness to sacrifice for something generally a nation but I would argue patriotism can be true for you know, an organization that you believe in, you know, your family gets it automatically, and we call it love instead of patriotism, but, but the willingness to sacrifice for something is a key feature of human success. And the idea that what you are when you have a divide that seems unbridgeable, you are attempting to tap into a sense of Hey, actually, even if we disagree, fundamentally, even if we can't resolve our disagreement about which direction to head, maybe you and I think we should be headed in opposite directions. But we both think that we should be headed in those directions for the good of x, right? For the same ultimate right? We both want good things for x. And if I knew that X was going to be served by what you are suggesting, rather than what I'm suggesting, I would go with so exact fundamental agreement about wanting to advance this cause or shut down that cause, right? These things are about a kind of agreement that is not analytical. Right?

**John Wood Jr** 28:33

Yes. Right. Exactly. Exactly. And so it right. And so this is the power, in my view of moral language properly done, because it's got to come from really, I feel like the point at which we make the case that we should be not just loving, loving our opponents, but that we are to believe in some overarching value in the American experiment that binds us as a people that there is a such a thing as we the people to begin with. It presupposes not just, you know, geographical proximity, it presupposes an actual kind of, you know, sort of metaphysical and idealistic connection between people, something that is potentially woven in heritage and history and experience

**Bret** 29:22

and would have been far more obvious to prior generations.

**John Wood Jr** 29:27

Right. So the first thing and for for various reasons, but just to just to make the point. Yeah, but it's something that has to be claimed. I think you have to sort of come out the bat and say it because I can I can argue that it would be practically beneficial in a utilitarian sense for us to craft this narrative and in the sort of depolarization space. There's been a lot of attempts to kind of think through how do you craft a narrative that works, right, that's able to compete with the, you know, the left wing narrative of who we are as a country and the right wing narrative, both of which are invested in making demons out of the other Right. And so that's there too bad faith narrative to bad faith narratives exactly, but but part of what makes them well, what makes them compelling, though, is that in half, in each having, you know, some aspect of truth to them, they do resonate in an emotionally real and true way, with much of the experience of the people who consume those narratives, but they're stated in a way to where they're just stated as matters of fact, like, just just as a matter of fact, America is a country founded in freedom, and the left is trying to take that freedom away. As a matter of fact, you know, America is a country, you know, founded in racial injustice, and folks on the right are trying to perpetuate this into a new era of beautiful and slaveholder. mutually exclusive. Exactly use but and but efforts sort of, you know, in the, in the kind of, I was gonna say in the center, it has that I want to put aside the ideological or, you know, yeah, not my center, I

**Bret** 30:52

know conversations in the center rather than about conversations

**John Wood Jr** 30:56

kamasi conversations in the center have not been able to produce a narrative that is similarly sort of self affirming, in a morally powerful kind of way, because it's all about well, how can we piece by piece construct a narrative and can we can we kind of test drive it with focus groups, and so forth to see what people respond to, is not a first person kind of statement terms of this is who we are as a country, and why that is similarly sort of weighty,

**Bret** 31:25

alright, so I have to drag us into the analytic layer for a second, because I believe that what you've just described can be, can be placed in analytical terms that are very, that are so accurate, that it's worth having the model right on the table. We are wired, as products of evolution, we are wired for both games, we are wired for the bad faith game. And we are wired for the good faith game. And in fact, we play these things simultaneously, right? You have some group with which you assume good faith, and then some other in which you don't, and you, you play the bad faith game in places where you expect bad faith to dominate, and you play the good faith game where you think that it can dominate. But the good faith game is fragile. And so the fact that you have these two narratives, and I love the way you describe them, these two narratives about what the United States is right? Both of which have some truth or truth to them, right? So but because they are compelling, and mutually exclusive, they signal we are in the bad faith game. And once the brain detects, we are in the bad faith game, it doesn't play the good faith game, because to do so in the bad faith game is to be a sucker, right. And so what I'm suggesting to you is, we who do love the country, for all of its flaws, would love to have the replacement, good faith narrative. But we are frustrated because it is too easy. Those who would like to play a different game to win at the expense of others are, they have the advantage because it is much easier to break the progress that leads to patriotic alignment than it is to establish it just for reasons that are very much analogous to the reason that entropy dominates water. So we it's an uphill battle, not because the vast majority majority of us would not benefit from coordinating over our shared love of you know, if not the country itself in its particular history, but the ideals that it was clearly set up to foster

**John Wood Jr** 33:48

right here's here's a way I look at success in this in this context. Because I think that we we tend to think of the efficacy of social movements as being reflected in their ability to scale and indeed, this is a space this, this both the both the the narrative that we're hoping takes place within within the crossfire of these two competing polarizing narratives, and also the community that forms around it, we're looking for both of these things to reinforce each other and to amplify and to expand the context of our country. But I think that part of what a powerful narrative and story does is in resonating in the experience of the people who who hear it, it also provides the basis upon which an in group is able to form and the phrase in group I think can can carry with it some oppressive connotations for people here because we think well if there's an in group that that means that that in group has no human concern for people in the out group and it becomes self serving and corrupt and and obviously that's that's something that is can frequently be But I think that in establishing a core culture around these principles that becomes compelling and powerful, I think that what we can accomplish is holding a space within the country, a center space that can grow, they can challenge the narratives on each side, that will not necessarily the existence the existence of which will not necessarily immunize the larger country from the consequences of some of the some of the past that it's on. I mean, look, to your point earlier, there are a lot of folks who aren't going to be interested in, you know, this, this more unifying storyline, and certain things are already in place now to where I think regardless of who wins the presidential election, 2020, Donald Trump will either be reelected, and certain things that are problematic now will continue to be more problematic into the future, or President Trump will lose, but will likely continue to be active as a very powerfully sort of subversive, you know, force in other parts of American life. And I'm not putting it all on Trump because the issue is both Trump and the reaction to Trump in my view, it always always has been since he's since he's come along. But as the consequences I think of the negative directions in which we're heading in other areas becomes clear. So too, I think we'll the both the practical necessity, but also the emotional appeal of the existence of a structured and organized community, loosely structured, but a community that is heterodox that is transporters and cross cultural, that is rooted in a deep faith in our transfer transcendent ideals and principles. I think that that that becomes a project whose appeal is potentially real and scalable to a degree in the moment. But that would also become more appealing over time, even simply on the basis of burgeoning recognition over time that this is what is necessary to preserve the American project in material terms, at the very least. Alright. And so I think that, I think that you might be able to look at a couple of models, I do think that the civil rights movement, the nonviolent movement, in particular, represents something like that. I mean, most people in the United States never became adherents of the non violent philosophy in any formal way. But a certain substantial portion of Americans did a minority, but a consolidated enough minority to shift the national consciousness in a powerful way. And the broader sort of cultural ripples that came from that have been pervasive in our sort of in, up until our up until largely our modern time in a way that has redefined the way we look at ourselves as a nation, even for people who are never at the epicenter of that movement, or don't have a direct sort of memory of what the substance of that was. So the ordinary conception of a social movement is something that explodes quickly, that hits the national conscious, like, like a, like a tidal wave, and is able to break a bunch of things and allow for things to be rebuilt in the aftermath, potentially, or reformed. But that conception is also an unwieldy one, there's another view of what a social movement can be, that is more like a tree that you nourish with seeds that begins to grow, and over the course of time becomes sort of a mighty oak in the middle of in the middle of the landscape, something that is stable and enduring. And to me, that's kind of how I begin to conceptualize with the substance of a deeper, more morally rooted, and again, sort of, you know, heterodox, and cross cultural movement. That, to me is sort of what success in that vein begins to look like over time. Okay.

**Bret** 38:55

I agree with what you said. The hidden tribes report, which you are no doubt familiar with, reflects this layer is a vast group. We do not live in the middle, but we come together in the middle, the exhausted majority, and they're exhausted majority. That group is real. I've met them, you've met them, anybody who plays the heterodox game will discover that they exist in large numbers. The problem is we have an antagonist, the thing that you're talking about this movement that is struggling to be born to replace the toxic, mutually exclusive narratives with a cohesive galvanizing narrative. We have an enemy and that enemy is something that wishes to keep us divided. It has for quite some time, it actually depends on our division in order to continue to maintain a sort of power that it did not win honorably, and does not hold on to for any reason other than that's what powerful entities attempt to do. So the question Really to me is, can those who are struggling to regain the patriotic center defeat whatever force it is either by bringing them on board with the patriotic narrative, or by overpowering them, can we rebuild that patriotic center. And I want to return to something you said earlier, which I think has a great deal of meaning to it. You argued something about people signaling with their policy preferences more than actually attempting to change something. And I've seen this as well. And I think it has to do with another pattern,

**John Wood Jr** 40:44

the expression of concern as opposed to the substance of concern, right. And

**Bret** 40:47

so if to use the the language of the heterodox movement, their virtue signaling, right, and virtue signaling for the point of some personal social gain rather than Yeah, and it's a phenomenon of right and left just is a phenomenon of both right and left. However, I believe it arose from something. And we've seen evidence of this in the recent political past. People do not relate to the fact that they collectively have any power. People feel powerless and they're not wrong to feel powerless, they have been largely powerless for some reason that nobody has quite put their finger on the policy of the nation seems to continue on. Even as the administration in power flips from one side to the other, something has created a an unstoppable train that heads in the same direction, almost no matter what Trump being one of the first things to disrupt this in recent memory. But in any case, the fact of being powerless of being asked to vote as if it was very important, actually, having very little impact when you pull the lever means that people have started to utilize the opportunity of an election for something else. They're venting, right? And so one of the things we saw, particularly with Brexit in the UK, was that people voted for Brexit. And then many of the people who voted for it were shocked that their sense was, and you know, I think this happened a little bit with Trump to where people were very angry about the Democratic Party having handed them Hillary Clinton and I was one of those people who was angry about that. But I did not vote for Trump. But many people did vote for Trump thinking, well, he's not going to win, they effectively thought they were casting a protest, right? And then, Holy moly, they've put this guy with his finger on the button. And that doesn't seem like a very good idea.

**John Wood Jr** 42:41

The good news guys, your vote counts here.

**Bret** 42:44

There's good news. And there's bad news, your vote counts and your vote counts. But But anyway, I think the sense of we are hovering in a space where in general, we don't have any power. But our power isn't actually zero. And so every so often, people are exercising their power and they're discovering, well, I wanted to vote against the European Union. I wanted to thumb my nose at the European Union, but I didn't want to leave it. Right. I meant to tell them I wanted to leave and they were like storming out threatening a divorce that they didn't intend to carry through with or something. But But anyway, so that's the question a, can we fix the political system so that we can stop virtue signaling, because if we actually did have power, it would cause people to sober up with respect to their virtue signaling, which has gotten out of control? So anyway, I'll leave it there and let you

**John Wood Jr** 43:37

as well yeah. And so I think that the I've always I've always looked at polarization, you know, the the vicious affective polarization that we're experiencing in this country today, tribal polarization manifesting and political divides. I've, I've always looked at that as essentially the the core the central structural problem in American politics, and maybe just society more broadly speaking. And this is a connection I think it's important to make and very basic one and easy, not easy to understand once you once you think about it. Some folks are not concerned with the problem of political and social polarization because they feel it's more important to focus on the structural issues affecting society, you know, the oligarchic way in which special interests run our government, regardless of the votes being cast, problems with systems from criminal justice to health care to you know, corporate relationship between any number of things but regardless of whether or not your issue is climate change, immigration, gun violence, etc. Any enduring sort of policy solution to these problems is going to depend on there being a consensus between people of different points of views and partisan affiliations. And that consensus is itself going to be subject subject to the relative social consensus and unity that exists within the American people sufficient to be able to motivate people politicians to, to vote and interact with each other in a collaborative sort of way. And so you can't solve. In a nutshell, you can't solve global warming unless you get a broad cross section of the people on board with a palatable policy solution. And you can't do that, unless you have a cultural shift that makes it possible for us to see each other as something other than enemies is something something other than villains. So I've certainly, you know, one starting point for beginning to consolidate This movement is by making the intellectual case that even if we're just looking at it, as a practical matter, you know, we have to, we have to be serious about the question, how do we establish, you know, social consensus, and what is the relationship of that to the actual social bonds in a in a society. But I think that if you accomplish that, you set the you set the preconditions necessary for the establishing of a new center of leverage, to begin to begin to move the existing structures around in such a way or to reform the existing structures in such a way that counteracts the sorts of trends that you're that you're identifying. So you're identifying this high level structural problem where people feel as if their participation in democracy doesn't count. And all we can think to do is to throw a wrench in the system. What I'm saying is that if we were to rediscover our deeper bonds with each other on a social and a social context, we could establish the Unity necessarily necessary to begin to leverage that against some of these existing structures, because as you say, they're predicated on division. And so you know, you robbed them of that advantage, then the equation changes. But again, it's a catch 22. Because how do you do that, given the fact that they have the advantage already? And I think that that's precisely what it is. We're ultimately trying to work out here. So I have thoughts on that. But was there anything in that Oh, jump off

**Bret** 46:59

so much. So I think we are in an interesting pickle. I don't know if I've mentioned this to you. But years ago, my good friend David Lottie, and I wrote a paper on the evolution of morality. And morality is a bit of a puzzle, because morality essentially involves people not taking opportunities that to a first approximation look like they would be evolutionarily profitable, right, not acting on impulses, for example. The paper was titled The better angels of our nature, obviously, alluding to the same quote from Abraham Lincoln. In any case, the paper put forward a model in which essentially, as the threat to an entity grows, the tendency to put aside the ability to profit at the expense of others within the entity grows with it. And as success is achieved, the tendency to behave benevolently to other members of that entity decreases, right so in essence, so I was actually, as we were writing the paper, I was explaining to somebody who asked me what I was working on. And they you know, somebody without was not scientifically oriented. And I described this model to them, and they said, Oh, when times are good, people are bad. Okay, once again, evolutionary biology rediscovers folk wisdom. But the point is, why are we facing people's why given that times are actually quite uncertain, are people that our model would predict they would be more patriotic rather than less patriotic that they would put aside their differences and pull it in the same direction as they do during war? But here's what I think is going on. You have two things in play. How much Jeopardy? Do you feel like you're in right? We feel a lot of Jeopardy, right? And with whom are you collaborating? So in other words, what you have is a thing that's patriotic over in the red space, right? fighting an enemy, which is the blue, and the blue folks are patriotic against the red, they see an enemy within America. And they are fighting it even though this is nonsense. Nonsense, but the enemy that each one sees on the other side is actually a very tiny and consequential thing. It is not the core of the people on the other side.

**John Wood Jr** 49:30

There was a germ of truth in the perception, but it's been magnified into this Boogeyman that's out of proportion to its actual reality, right? I think in each case, So the upshot of this is to do and yet the more you believe that the more true it becomes, but but as you get right,

**Bret** 49:47

it's a positive feedback. So the point is, the more divided we get the heart of the job gets of reversing course and collaborating at a larger scale. And this is in part I think, why the radicalized one another Yeah, we radicalize each other. That's right. This is why though the right has the particular misapprehension that it has about. I don't want to say climate because I think the climate puzzle is complex, but about sustainability. So when I talk to people on the right, and I say something about a sustainability crisis, they hear climate, right? They are primed to hear those things as synonymous, I can't escape it. And my feeling is, I know we have a sustainability crisis. I believe we have a climate crisis. But if the climate crisis isn't real, we still have a sustainability problem, right? And we're, you know, if the climate crisis isn't real, we got lucky on the climate front, it's not that we didn't behave in a way that could have caused the climate problem. But the core of the problem remains, right, the core problem is we're behaving in a massively unsustainable way. And this will not go on very long, we will destroy ourselves through one mechanism or another no matter what we do. And so, of course, that should galvanize, not only Americans across left and right, it should galvanize the world. Right. Now, if you're on the right, the idea of an enemy so large, that we would be forced to galvanize at a global level is a bit frightening, because of, frankly, some very real fears that exist for meaningful reasons on the right about, you know, global power structure. So to the extent that you fear government as the right, properly does, to the extent that you fear government, the idea of bigger, more powerful government had larger and larger scale is even more frightening, the solution is almost worse than the problem or maybe is, and, you know, there are many cases in which the right is actually correct about this, that the solution is worth worse than the problem. And it's not that the problem isn't real. It's just that there's a way it is inevitable that if you attempt to build, if you attempt to architect solutions, you're going to create unintended consequences that you didn't see coming. So because of that, one has to be cautious in the building, you have to discover what those consequences are, you have to figure out how to mitigate them. And sometimes you have to realize, oh, solving that problem wasn't worth it. Now, in the case of a global sustainability crisis. I don't know when you have a spare planet somewhere, because if not, we have to deal with that one. Musk is working on it. I think, No, he's not. No, he's sending us to Mars, which is an escapist fantasy and I opinion that is going to set us back with respect to fixing the earth now

**John Wood Jr** 52:30

maybe real estate prices are more affordable.

**Bret** 52:33

I am certainly are although you have to like the color scheme, right? So I should say to in fairness to Musk, I think Musk is on balance, a positive force. I like his visionary streak. And in principle, I'm not against the idea that it would be wise to get some people onto another planet, just in case. The problem is that has to be done very carefully. And the meaningfully getting people to Mars, getting people to Mars in a way that it's actually some sort of a failsafe mechanism for humanity. We are so far from that goal, that selling people that fantasy now is dangerous, because it D motivates us.

**John Wood Jr** 53:14

Yeah. That doesn't really seem like a short term solution to our problems.

**Bret** 53:17

And I mean any of it, right? Yeah, it's not Yeah, it's not it's not inconceivable that it could work. But I think there are many hundreds of years away,

**John Wood Jr** 53:25

what but you pointed to something earlier, which I thought was interesting enough to flag because you said that, given the uncertainty in our society right now, you might think under normal circumstances that people would be consolidating and uniting to face commonly appreciated threats. And yet the threats that we appreciate are all loaded on one side of the partisan spectrum or the other first, you know, perpetuating our division. But I actually think that what we're seeing is probably more in accord with the predictions of your model than not that, you know, times are good people like bad, and so forth. Because there's this strange sort of, there's this strange sort of paradox, I think, in the way we see and feel life in America today, which is, which is both contradictory and yet true. And it's contradiction, which is that things are precarious. And our institutional stability and credibility, the stability and credibility of our institutions, is teetering in a very kind of frightening way. And yet, the vast majority of us are materially secure. You know, I mean, the vast majority of us are are eating every day. homelessness and housing. It's a big problem many places, but you know, problems are all always relative. Right? relatively speaking, you know, the, the ordinary American experience is not one of material of private. Absolutely. And so you have this moment in which, on the one hand, we are in Steven Pinker's world and Steven Pinker, who obviously wrote a book called better angels as well, right? You know, Pinker's thesis is that this is the best and most prosperous time and not just American history, but in human history to be alive, right. And that seems to be true across many dimensions, I think. And in the most obvious sorts of sorts of material, once again, most of us, most of us are safe. But we turn on the TV, and we see incidents of mass violence, and it makes us feel incredibly insecure, those incidents are real. And they point to things that are that are more troubling, most of us, most of us are eating, but we have a heightened sort of consciousness of the injustice of income inequality and poverty. that triggers I think, a vicious moral and emotional response to these to these issues,

**Bret** 55:49

it was the most prosperous of times it was the most perilous of time, right? It is simultaneously both Pinker's world is not wrong, right. But there is a, an awareness about the possibility of it turning around. And

**John Wood Jr** 56:03

so it becomes sort of, I guess, a reality in which the, the, the formula for catalyzing or motivating virtue signaling on a societal scale, you know, becomes powerfully reinforced, because on the one hand, you don't really have the immediate kind of material deprivation that might motivate us to collectively look more soberly, at a unifying problem and rediscover our internal bonds in terms of how to deal with it. But you do have all of these emotional triggers, which in addition to all the ways in which technology and Mass Communication kind of sparks, our reactions is laid across a broader landscape of just demographic shifting, and, you know, social fracturing for other reasons. You have all these other things that are causing us to engage in in moral warfare. Because while we're not really feeling, we're not really feeling the pain in our stomach so much, but we are feeling the pain in our hearts in some real way. You know, we're not starving to death. But we're nevertheless starving for some kind of sense of broader meaning broader purpose, broader connection, and we're arriving at it in our tribal animosity towards one another. And in that In so doing, we wind up making more real, this sense that civilization is on the verge of some broader collapse, in Pinker's formulation shouldn't be really, because things were too good. But the fact that we're sort of operating, it's something of, we're malnourished, in some more kind of psychological level, we are

**Bret** 57:49

emotionally and maybe philosophically

**John Wood Jr** 57:53

starving, right? It's causing us to destabilize society in a way that will ultimately make good on our assumptions, that things are just that bad.

**Bret** 58:02

I worry a lot about this tendency for various processes to bring about exactly that. Right. And that they claim is going

**John Wood Jr** 58:12

you and I have really been talking about self fulfilling prophecies and destruction sort of all the way through here. Yep, you know,

**Bret** 58:19

and there is something you know, whatever it is, I do feel a kind of kinship with you and a few others. But there's a sort of sense of, I don't know, maybe I've mentioned it somewhere else before maybe maybe I haven't, but there's a Are you a fan of The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy? Man, I've never read it. I've read it's great. I know. But there's a at the beginning of the book, I don't want to spoil it for you, man. I go ahead. Okay. I'm gonna spoil a little tiny bit. Okay. Okay. The earth is actually promised to forget. Okay, good, wonderful. The earth is a, an attempt to solve the riddle of life, the universe and everything. Right. So there was a computer that tried to do it, and it came up with Okay, 42 and that didn't satisfy people. So the earth is designed to explore the question. And the earth is about to be destroyed to put a hyperspace bypass through the sector.

**John Wood Jr** 59:17

eminent domain, right, exactly.

**Bret** 59:20

galactic eminent domain, whatever it is, to me is straightened vitesse. Yeah. So, anyway, the Earth is about to be destroyed. But of course, the Earth is this project to discover the meaning of life, the universe and everything. And that meaning arises in the mind of a young woman who suddenly realizes what the meaning of life, the universe and everything is, right? And she picks up the phone to deliver the message, right as the earth is destroyed. So the idea is that somehow it's maybe even cosmically destined that upon discovery. Information won't even get out or maybe that's just dumb luck, but But anyway, my point is there is something resonant in that story for me, because I feel like, you know, maybe I'm wrong, maybe we're much better off than I think we are. But, you know, I'm not just guessing that we're in trouble. I spent a lot of time studying to figure out how complex systems work. And this complex system is in grave danger. For very simple reasons. Because of the amount of power we have at our disposal relative to the amount of wisdom we have to control it, right? I agree. So the point is, if you are somewhere on earth, and you've spotted that problem, then it's like, you're on the Titanic hurdling into the North Atlantic, and it's not gonna last and the point is, well, is there anything to be done about it? Or am I gonna end up picking up the phone with the answer to life, the universe and everything and? Right,

**John Wood Jr** 1:00:50

well, right, well, so we mentioned the dynamic of self fulfilling prophecy at play in all of this, if you're on the right, you know, my feeling is that the left is not as bad as you've been told, if you're on the left, I would say the right is not as bad as you've been told. But the more you think that that is the case about the other side, the more you are going to treat them accordingly, the more they're going to react to you in a way that's going to make them more sympathetic with the worst. The worst angels, let's say are with the demons of not only their own nature, but it's going to make them more sympathetic with those people in their groups who are already particularly radicalized. And who are maybe as bad as you might think. And so, you know, the polarization pushes people on the right, closer to the alt right, people on the left, closer to anti anti fall, and so forth, all these gradations. And then, of course, in the other in the other context, you know, the world is not as bad off, as we think. But if we assume that it is, you know, that it is, this is just the most injust time to be alive in America or the United States that we're going to act with the sort of desperation, you know, yeah, that is going to cause us to virtue signal and to put solutions on the table that are meant to polarize and not to solve things that it's going to push us towards all the negative inevitabilities that we imagined, but become more and more real on the basis of our fears. But this is why I started off actually by talking about the importance of a unifying narrative being something that is ultimately declared in sort of a first person kind of way, because I do believe that there's a positive reinforcing cycle to be triggered in much the same way. And, you know, I, I understand if this comes across, in a way of, if this comes across as me saying something along the lines of, you know, obvious from a faith based perspective, if you believe something, you know, it'll become it'll become real. And you know, we just need to have manifest and attract a better America and so forth. But there's, but there's a more grounded way to put this, I think, which is to say that in my conversation here with you, Brett, and I think it is substantively important for me to put this in personal terms, actually. But, you know, I'm a, if we're just speaking on the levels of level of labels, you know, I'm a black Christian Republican, you know, and you are a progressive. I don't know if you refer to yourself as atheist or agnostic.

**Bret** 1:03:16

I don't say atheist, I don't say agnostic.

**John Wood Jr** 1:03:19

I don't give you a label that does not your fit doesn't fit but certainly skeptic would that be? Would that be a reason I

**Bret** 1:03:24

don't believe there's anything supernatural going on in the universe. So most people would call me an atheist.

**John Wood Jr** 1:03:28

Understood, understood. So a person who other people might refer to as an atheist, you are politically politically progressive. Think you're a white guy, as well.

**Bret** 1:03:37

Some days I am and I heard that I'm not it depends how people feel about Jews,

**John Wood Jr** 1:03:41

I guess. Right? Exactly. I i've, for me, though. You're a person who and really the point of this is not flattery is a matter of fact, just for people listening, I am lying in this moment, just to make a point. But you are what is best in America?

**Bret** 1:03:56

Right? And hell yeah, I knew it somewhere deep down, I knew I said,

**John Wood Jr** 1:04:00

I was lying to be jump off the mic. Let me know how I really feel. But I mean, you're you're an individual who genuinely does believe I think in in Liberty, and you have your conception of what that looks like in practice, but you believe in the ideal, you believe in the idea of equality and justice before the law. But on a kinetic sort of level, there's nothing in our labels or appearances that keep us from looking at each other, and just sort of intuiting pretty quickly on the basis of little bit of conversation, that there's a deeper bond there that, you know, even without even having any sustained personal interaction, we can tell that there's a level of there's a level of commonality that allows us to be basically trusting of one another enough to explore deeper levels of friendship and collaboration. And even if we never got to that point, person to person, it's because the groups that we come from all these different label differences, right. While there are Differences between all of these categories, we exist within a larger sort of cultural and historical context that allows us, even without thinking about it, I think as Americans to make something of an assumption day by day, and again, this is less true for some folks and more true for others, but certainly in my case and yours, I think that we're largely predisposed towards thinking that, you know, I walk into a supermarket with a bunch of people look like Brett Weinstein, I don't necessarily have the sense that anybody in there is someone who isn't basically hospitable to my, to my better interest and Me, me towards them, right, because none of these labels signified to me signify any level of difference, that would overwhelm the larger sort of category of commonality that comes with us being, you know, certainly fellow human beings, but more particularly Americans who have some basic sort of consensus over the importance of these unifying ideals, you know, beneath what I would like for the label American to actually mean. And so in in declaring that, you know, part of the, the power of politics and statesmanship well done is that it introduces, I think, kind of an axiomatic language of moral and cultural solidarity that needs to be filled in, right, I mean, you know, the, the lofty rhetoric needs to be filled in with an appreciation of historical context and where our ideas our ideas come from, but even that is substantively suffused by the experiences that we share in in debating over these things, and fighting for them and working together to preserve these ideals that allow us to cohere as a nation and as a people, and so forth. And so, I want to get people back in the habit of not feeling such knee jerk skepticism or cynicism, towards the idea that we might share something transcendent, as Americans that you know, to, to greater degrees or lesser degrees of efficacy at any particular period of time, has nevertheless, always to some degree served as the basis upon which a diverse people in this country have managed to cohere over times of tremendously, you know, die dynamic complexity and difficulty in order to be at the point to where Steven Pinker's basic premise is still right at this very moment, we're standing, we're standing on the edge of a cliff, right? But even so, not having completely got off it yet just teetering. Looking over, we're still at a lofty height, in terms of everything that we have to be thankful for both materially and socially and culturally, as a country.

**Bret** 1:07:48

So I want to stop you right there. There's something additional, which is that the the force I mentioned the force that doesn't want us to unite that wants us to be divided, that force introduces something into the conversation on both sides, which I consider particularly diabolical. And I know you will have seen it too, which is the implication that to engage people on the other side, is to invite some kind of danger or to contaminate yourself, morally, or, and so what that does is it causes people not to be able to hear you not to be able to detect your humanity, because they fear that if they were to give you a chance, that it would suddenly make them the enemy to the people on whom they are defending. Absolutely. And so in some sense, the the biggest hazard to the project that you've been talking about the creation of this heterodox central conversation, the biggest hazard is that the normal mechanisms that allow us to detect who we might have a productive conversation with have been unhooked my forces we can't see that would really rather we not have that conversation.

**John Wood Jr** 1:09:11

That's right. That's, that's absolutely true. And it's why in a lot of our language and better angels, we talk about the fact that we are that we are red and blue together, right? If you look at our website, there's a phrase in there somewhere that says that we're red and blue together in a working Alliance, and but I'm from from my vantage point, it's why the it's why the term American has to become bigger and stronger and more powerful and more resonant than that's the phrases, you know, Republican and Democrat or conservative and liberal again, right? The it's okay for us to have these categories. But the only reason I even mentioned your labels and my labels I mean, on a more fundamental level, you know, we're we're Bretton john, and that's what's more, that's what's more important the labels are always faulty approximations of what we really are in our in our heads. But the reason it was important for me to mention those labels is to demonstrate the fact just by virtue of our being here having this type of a conversation, that there is a greater sort of shared identity, or soil of values between us, that transcends those things. And so in the work of better angels we've highlighted, we literally have a phrase for red and blue pairs, if you look at our social media, sometimes we'll will post testimonials from people who have pairs of individuals who have developed friendships across this right left divide. But the reason we do that sort of thing is to challenge precisely the kind of, you know, toxic norm that you're pointing to, which says that you are sacrificing something in yourself or betraying your team by daring to have a friendship with or to otherwise see the humanity in somebody from the other side. We're trying to make the case that not only are you not selling out anyone on your side, but you're developing more accurate sense of just who your side really is. That is to say that your side is an ought to be if you're really going to live up to the best of left or right, the American side, and that American actually mean something. This isn't just a generic descriptor. But you know, but but but I do think that the nature of the project and to to create motivated scale this, this broader movement

**John Wood Jr** 1:11:28

has to be again and revisiting this question of what makes us what makes us an American people, what is this nation really, in its essence, and to introduce into the conversational landscape and the broader political conversation, a narrative that drills into this point and is able to dislodge the the essential sort of duopoly that you have between these two polarizing status quos. And so in that, in this vein, actually, we're, we're, we're currently launching Well, we will be launching the spring of 2020, our better angels 2020 campaign, like we're literally going to take to the road and hit the stop. And so from one part of the country to the next, I'll actually be giving, be giving speeches, where I attempt to the utmost of my power to articulate a vision, and sort of speak a narrative that highlights what is truly best and most powerful and transcendent in the values that exist on the left and on the right, speak to some of the cultural and social experiences that exist on each side of this divide. And to weave these elements together into a common story that seeks to dimension the problem of and begin to provide the basis for an answer to the question, what does it mean to be an American, and who we are, and who are we as a country. But in doing that, what we will also be doing at these at these events across the country is holding community debates that proceed these speeches when we invite people from across the aisle from the local community. So I mean, we're going to be in we're likely to be in Los Angeles and Nashville in Minnesota, and, and North Carolina and different places. And in each stop, we're going to bring people together to have a better angels debate on this question, what does it mean to be an American or something to that effect? And the thing about the the nature of our debate program is that, first of all, it's a parliamentary style debate. It's not just people sort of screaming at each other on a panel or whatnot. The madam chairperson you address your questions to the chair and so forth. But our debates are designed not to focus on winning and losing or scoring political points. It is an invitation to the American people, ultimately, the people who participate, to speak in candid terms about why they what why they buy why they believe what they believe about a given issue. And in this case, what does it mean to be an American, but to also be honest and upfront and comfortable reflecting upon their doubts and their uncertainties with respect to their view, or their opinion on this question. And so it's a debate structure that invites reflection and focuses on intellectual humility, and a collaborative search for truth that extends across the aisle, right. And so our hope is to kick off this larger conversation, to bring the American people into it in a direct way. And hopefully, and it is our ambition to ultimately bring the sort of attention to this conversation necessary to scale up this fundamental conversation about who we are as a people across the country in a way that can impact what is otherwise going to be just a terribly vicious presidential election. That something that has the potential I think to rip apart what solid Already we have left in the center of our cultural core as Americans. So the, this is going to be an effort of creating a centripetal force in our social consciousness. And it's it's all hands on deck, right. But I think that the moment that we're going into, because it will take us closer to the common sort of appreciation of the real enemy that is threatening all of us in this country, which is to say, really just sort of the worst angels of our nature ourselves, our our eagerness to tear things apart, that are valuable and meaningful in this country, just for the sake of getting back of the other side. At the end of the day, I think that the moment that we will be in will be, perhaps paradoxically, as things do get, seem to get bad, right, in certain areas,

**John Wood Jr** 1:15:54

the most opportune moment for something good to take place in the take shape and the heart of that, you know, and so, I think that in what it is, you and I are discussing here, this question of how we consolidate this new space and grow it. I think that timing is also, you know, a factor here, because none of these are static questions, all these questions are moving, they're all in flow and flux. And I think that the intellectual dark web space has done something tremendous. And providing a broad landscape upon which we can sort of loosen the garments of our partisan and tribal affiliations in a common pursuit, pursuit of truth, in a re acquiescence to the necessity of reason and objectivity, to allow us to explore both deeper similarities and a deeper understanding of complex material and social phenomenon. And I think that what is left to be added to that, potentially, is a an unearthing of our shared sort of cultural and moral sort of sort of foundation as a people in a way that takes a heterodox conversation and routes this energy into the forming of a consolidated sense of transcendent identity. And I think that if we can accomplish that, then regardless of who wins in 2020, there will be a stabilizing and grounded social and political force in the United States, that can begin to establish some leverage over the over the competing, but also perversely collaborative, polarizing media party and corporate corporate structures in America that are so invested in, in sowing the seeds of division to maintain their own power, I think the counterbalance could be established over the oddly enough, over the course of the most divisive campaign in American history. That's what I'm hoping for.

**Bret** 1:17:53

I love this idea. And I agree with you that the, what you have at the moment is an unpredictable landscape. And that is the moment in which something new and quite positive could emerge. And if nothing new and positive emerges, I expect it will go the other direction. So at a personal level, as an atheist, adjacent person, let me say Godspeed. And if I can talk to my audience, I think if you can hear what john is saying, and it speaks to you, I imagine it will, you should make a point of going to see one of these events if it is in your neck of the woods, because the sense of camaraderie that arises out of a meeting of the minds between people who don't come from the same, the same team is it is incredibly rewarding. And it is also incredibly reassuring to discover that the narratives we've been handed about other people and their their failure to, to rise to the standards of humanity or whatever it is that we're told about the other, that to the extent that these events are designed to short circuit that process, and to jumpstart a better one, I promise you, you will leave smiling.

**John Wood Jr** 1:19:22

But yeah, they can also be joyful. I mean, there is a ridiculous amount of joy. Actually, in in this work. There really is. And, you know, so my fundamental confidence in the in the fact that the idea that we can accomplish this right, stems from the fact that I really do believe that there's just sort of, there's just sort of, I think, an evolutionary momentum that ultimately sort of attends to the more subtle but also more durable bonds of social consolidation that happens through our positive connection. I mean, you know, hatred and fear and chaos are very obvious phenomenons and social life, they quickly catalyze social momentum. But again, it's fractured, and it leads to dissolution and deterioration. But on the other, but the the, the emphasis of that is sort of the, the substance of goodwill, the webs of goodwill, that allow us to actually order ourselves socially in a way that does not necessarily rely chiefly on force, in fact, does not rely chiefly on force, but arises from an internal motivation for us to treat each other in a certain way. Because at the end of the day, we are also wired for the good faith game, as you said, and there is something there's something simply satisfying about rediscovering these bonds. And the idea that, you know that the idea that the theory, the spirit of family, let us say, can be extended far beyond the circle that you immediately inhabit, just so long as we're able to find establish the subtle connections that already exist between us but go on acknowledged that the discovery of which can we animate, in our in our broader sort of social social sphere?

**Bret** 1:21:16

I totally agree. And I must say, I don't know it's not exactly my job, but it is the world that I've been catapulted into the last couple of years is one where I'm constantly in conversation with people I'm not supposed to be able to have a conversation with and what you're saying about the the emotional satisfaction that comes from discovering that there is a rich world of people who are ready to have these conversations, I can't emphasize enough how much better no matter what our circumstance is, no matter how much peril there is, it is vastly more pleasurable, more satisfying, and much less perilous feeling just to know that there are a great many people with whom we are in it together,

**John Wood Jr** 1:22:13

right? That's right. The America of today is a product in many respects, of the Cold War, and the civil and the non violent movement. Right? That is to say that the America of today carries with it many of the fears and anxieties that characterize that long period of American history. And if flowed into given many of our current ideological divisions, as Americans, there's still a Red Scare within America, we still looked at Russia with fear and trepidation. And they're still just sort of this this broader kind of, sort of McCarthy and tendency for us to want to root out the aliens from among us, you know, the the underminer is those people who are subverting the what should be the true and proper American order. But we are also the descendants of a more recent tradition that calls upon us to see the best in one another, to go into conversations with each other, with the conviction that there is some shared heritage as Americans in some shared dignity and values human beings upon which we can build what Dr. King referred to as the beloved community. And similarly, I think that the, the America of our, of our of our children's generation, you and I both have young children, you're about 50 years older than I am. So your kids are a little older than mine, I'm 50

**Bret** 1:23:36

years older than you that's this is very close.

**John Wood Jr** 1:23:40

No, probably just five or 10. But um, the America of our children's generation, so moving, is going to be a product, yes, of the chaos and polarization of you know, the the Obama years and the Trump years and so forth. But it's also going to be a product of the types of conversations and connections and, and intellectual and social and moral shifts that you and I and so many others across this heterodox spectrum are working on now. And so it gives us reason to kind of look to the future with a realistic assessment of the fact that appreciation of the fact that on the one hand, certain things perhaps have already been done in our society, that will have to play out, right. I mean, and you know, how, what the fallout is from from certain patterns, we hope will be substantially mitigated by the positive things that we hope to engender. But one way or another, there just as there's a momentum to the negative and the chaotic things that are happening in America right now, so to or is there a momentum to the constructive movements that are swelling up beneath us even as we speak, and you know, that momentum is going to come to a head to something constructive will come about and I'm confident that it will endure to something that becomes a legacy that we're able to leave to the next generation of woods and Weinstein's, you know, that comes along.

**Bret** 1:25:10

So well, can I go back? You raise the specter of communism? Yeah. And I feel it is well worth saying that I am not nor have I ever been a member of the Communist Party. No.

**John Wood Jr** 1:25:22

Okay. I was a little nervous there.

**Bret** 1:25:26

So actually, there's, there's some family history there where we faced that particular McCarthy's threat. But I do want to point out that, you know, this conversation is now back about things like communism of all of all different ways of being. And I want to just put what I believe to be the right answer here on the table. Because it's better than fighting the caricatures. Sure. I think people's fear of communism is on the one hand cartoonish. And on the other hand, accurate enough, I understand what the fear is, is a way in which communism simply doesn't function based on Game Theory. And that those who wish to engage in that particular utopian experiment are inviting a failure mode or one of several. On the other hand, I think this can be said, Of essentially all of the named ideologies that we find on the map. And what we are, in fact discovering is that none of these pure ideologies actually work. And that we are in need of a nuanced reevaluation, where we look at the great advantages that come from certain perspectives. A justice oriented perspective is where communism begins, and then it ends in catastrophe if you play it out. But what we need to do is figure out which portion of the truth is held by which of these ideological factions and then figure out again, it's a question of admixture. How do you take the values from this system, and disassociate them as much as possible with the costs of that system, and blend these things so that we get a system in which we get, you're not going to get 100% of the benefits imagined in any of them? But you can get a large fraction, if you join them correctly? And so, in essence, that recognition that yes, the communists are wrong, right? So are the libertarians, right? The fact that these entities are wrong, is an invitation for all of us to have a discussion about, well, which portion is correct? And which portion turned out not to be true? And what do we do about that knowledge, once we figure out what it is, to me, that is a very exciting moment to live in, if we can have that conversation, which is the one I hear you trying to catalyze. If we can have that conversation, then the future might be very bright. And we can figure out how to manage this collectively in our, in our, in the interest of a a productive and humane, a just future that we can access together, you know, with the proper combination of empathy, and analytics, and all of these things. So

**John Wood Jr** 1:28:31

Well, here's the and here's the the power in not just the observation that you're making, but the implications of the observation that you're making. The idea that there is that there is truth to be discovered, and all of these different ideological persuasions, that each of them when taken to their extremes are going to become corrupt, but that the process of sifting through these perspectives allows us to arrive at the optimal way of conducting ourselves politically and in governments, etc. But the truth of that points us towards a, a starting point, that is probably as close to a 100% kind of sort of like, you know, positive philosophical worldview that you and I might agree upon, as we're likely to find here, which is the idea that the structures that allow us to compare these different points of view in a way that channels our, our emotional and intellectual commitments to various positions against one another in a constructive tension that can yield that sort of output, that that, that that, that the, the need for those structures points to the validity of the of the project of reasoned discourse, fundamentally, and also within that, the sort of secular sanctity, if you will, of the idea of a participatory democracy, a participatory republic in the essential kind Have aims that are in evidence in the construction of our constitutional system and the values that went into our, into our nation's founding in the first place? Because I think that within this question of what does it mean to be an American has to be a an element that points to our common what has tended to be in American history, and then some respects is threatened today, of course, but that nevertheless has generally been on left and right, a common appreciation of the fact that self governance is part of the heritage of our people. But our ability to do that rests on our fidelity to the idea that reasoned deliberation is the means by which we are able to take subjective experience and channel it into something approximating policies arrived at for the common good. And there is a constitutional structure which, you know, can be amended, and we can say that, maybe it should be amended more easily than it has been, maybe not this conversation to be had over that. But nevertheless, on a structural level, it returns us to the idea that there ought be some fidelity expressed in our, in our society, for the importance of the rule of law for the importance of constitutional integrity, but then on a more spiritual and idealistic level. And a social level, there need be a similar respect paid towards the idea that part of the very substance of liberty and equality itself is the freedom for us to be able to interact with one another in the area of reasoned discourse and deliberation, in, in politics, per se, and in every other aspect of our lives, which lends meaning to the idea of equality on a social level in the first place, right? In other words, reason is the, in the pursuit of, really the pursuit of the pursuit of truth is part of the fuel that animates the fuel that drives

**John Wood Jr** 1:32:09

our constitutional system and our democratic culture. And so when we ask this question, what does it mean to be an American, I believe that part of the answer to that is a belief in the power of logic and reason and conversation, to allow us to work together in a constructive and a collaborative way. So there's a practical argument to be made for what it is, you're talking about the synthetic approach to finding a more viable philosophical way forward, out of the admixture of our various philosophical and ideological starting points. But that process itself is something that I think descends to us in part from an American heritage that at its core, is committed to the ideals that that yield that. And so that's part of the story that needs to be told is that we are a brass, we're not always a reasonable people, as Americans, but it is in us to seek to be that it is part of our heritage to believe in the power of that, you know, this nation nation was formed through deliberative processes most most countries are not, in not in quite the way that that ours were, you know, founded this nation by committee, well as, as well as, you know, bullets and brawn and so forth, you know, and that's actually a wonderfully inspiring thing to imagine that men can bring their ideals to a process to a project of forming a community that's structured in such a way so as to preserve liberty and equality while still allowing for subjectivity and individuality and different perspectives to compete with each other. So, you know, make America intellectual again, man, that's part of what we need to do.

**Bret** 1:33:50

So would you. Would you join me in the sentiment that extremism in pursuit of reasonableness is no vise? I think I would you would Okay. All right. Well, we can move ahead on that basis then, and maybe force people to be reasonable.

**John Wood Jr** 1:34:07

We also have the Weinstein for senate campaign slogan. We do now. Yes, yes. You just said it.

**Bret** 1:34:13

Oh, that was it. Oh, good. Oh, yes. All right. Sure. I didn't know that I was running. Yeah,

**John Wood Jr** 1:34:17

you did that? Well, you know, no. Okay. Well, you've been nominated.

**Bret** 1:34:20

I was a bit better. I hear it. Hear that on the street. All right. Cool. So you have a speaking tour lined up? Are there other big plans on the horizon?

**John Wood Jr** 1:34:34

Well, I mean, they're always there always are. Some things are classified. Mr. Weinstein, you'll know about them? No, I

**Bret** 1:34:42

need to know basis. And I don't need to know in due time. Yeah.

**John Wood Jr** 1:34:47

Well, I think that what's interesting to me is, is just the evolution of this space, broadly speaking. I mean, again, there's sort of a disparate constellation of or organizations and groups that are seeking to not only expand heterodox conversations in this country, but create the structures and the processes by which we might establish intergroup and interpersonal empathy and social unity, to scale these these norms of civic decency, if you will, up in a way that concrete organized structures by which we can challenge a polarizing status quo. And so, you know, better angels is a bipartisan organization working in this way. Most of the depolarization groups with which I'm familiar with tend to lean lean left, but I've been working with a group called the American project out of the Pepperdine School of Public Policy, which is a grouping of conservative intellectuals and academics, and activists and some others who are committed to the task of reforming the conservative movement in a direction that is, in many respects, more communitarian, and more broadly embracing of the shared civic heritage that extends across the across the the political spectrum to embrace the left as well as the right wing political heritage in this country that makes us all a part of a civic unit. And I am, in my work, I go from, you know, and then the the isolated efforts of people like Cornel West and Robert P. George, to tour the country and demonstrate in the context of their own friendship and their own lecturer in

**Bret** 1:36:32

the mentorship of what you said, People forming partnerships.

**John Wood Jr** 1:36:36

Well, that's right, that's right. So there's no lack of creativity in this broader space. What has been lacking is the consolidation, what has been lacking is the sort of centripetal force within the centripetal it within the center sort of area, that would allow it to coalesce into something dynamic, that again, could attain the sort of momentum that can viscerally challenge the status quo that exists now. And so my, you know, my my work is tended in the direction of trying to tie those pieces, trying to tie those pieces together. But ultimately, I don't expect to be done, I don't expect that that's something that I am just able to do as, as an individual or you and I as two people, I think that our greatest ally in this in this course, it's just the momentum that is already in place against the backdrop of the negative momentum that we can count on to, you know, to awaken people to the urgency of this of this project. And, you know, on the one on one hand, it can be a bit dispiriting to look into the future, given the looming shadows that we see. I mean, the the houses now moving towards launching a formal impeachment proceeding of the President of the United States, and you know, many folks may think that that's a good thing, and I wouldn't, I wouldn't I wouldn't attempt to persuade anybody otherwise, but it does. It is a foreboding sort of oven in terms of where this country is going. Absolutely. on a deeper level.

**Bret** 1:38:07

I mean, I do think what the President did is very troubling that on the other hand, he basically he famously speaks off the cuff and says really appalling things and to take this one to impeachment. Frankly, I'm not sure what the right thing to do is because it is obviously very troubling to have a president imply things in the context of an election like this. But Wow, the drums of impeachment have been drummed loud from the bisola of his taking office. And it does seem like people are jumping at something that might constitute grounds where, effectively it's not hard to see how this could end. I mean, by the way thing, yeah, terrible,

**John Wood Jr** 1:38:57

right. But by the way, I'm conscious of the fact as we as we touch on Trump here, again, that just from a pure consumer perspective, probably a lot of people who, who would want to hear the part of this conversation where it's like Brett Weinstein and john wood Jr. on Donald Trump and we spend the next like 10 or 20 minutes just talking about talking about Trump, right? That's Trump is good for clicks and

**Bret** 1:39:19

it's good for clicks

**John Wood Jr** 1:39:20

ratings and

**Bret** 1:39:21

so maybe we'll edit them out for that reason.

**John Wood Jr** 1:39:24

Right exactly we don't want too many people no we don't want the click watching this video right we're anti click exactly exactly that's how against the grain we are. Oh,

**Bret** 1:39:31

so again, we're not even gonna put it on the on the net exam. They want to see it this is a con this I mean, with the tape is an Inception

**John Wood Jr** 1:39:39

thing going out here like no intellectual darkweb Dark Horse podcast. How much darker can we get before people can't even see the amazing things that we're doing best when we build French roasts? That's when we have reached true philosophical commitment. Yes, exactly. When that gone completely dark. Exactly. Yes, that's what we're looking for. But um, it's it is it It is, you know, I think why I even brought this up. I mean, I know why it it is it is interesting to note what motivates people is consumers at a certain point, like the I look forward to the moment where people realize the fact that we do have the ability to sort of shift this conversation in a way that from a demand side of things, is able to sort of change the market viability of certain messages and certain ideas in certain certain messages and so forth. Right now, Trump is a messenger for a sort of, you know, sort of chaos and our culture and our government, and so forth, that drives support on some level from even from his worst enemies, because everybody's so obsessed with them. Yeah, you know, and one thing I would just encourage people about is to just not be so obsessed with Donald Trump. And look, it's not that he's not an important, you know, figure, and all of this, he is. And But Trump would not exist, if we're not for pre existing patterns, welcome Jesus symptom, he really is a symptom, and some people want to push back against that. But anybody who sees him as the root cause of these larger problems, is on the one hand, therefore, I think, going to act in a way to where they're going to seek a short term solution to the problem of Donald Trump, which is likely not even to be effective. And that might be what's happened, I hear this and urge

**Bret** 1:41:32

this on, these people are so focused on Trump that they have the sense that if we can just deal with that problem, that we will be somewhere and the fact is, we would be nowhere,

**John Wood Jr** 1:41:42

but even if but even if they succeeded in that, in that effort, it would likely result in a, you know, it would likely be attended by more or less adeptness, to the to the broader and deeper concerns which brought them about in the first place, which will therefore lead to a continuation of those subterranean trends will still be here, 20 years down the road, one way or another, because somebody you know, craft, you're smarter than the Presidents on so forth, we'll come back the other way. And I would say a similar thing, to conservatives who believe that because actually, it's precisely parallel, for many Republicans and conservatives, including a good many who would net who would tell you pretty readily that they don't want to, they don't want their kids to look to Donald Trump as a role model. But they felt that there needed to be a strong man, you know, who stood up against the extremism of the left against the, you know, the social justice lunacy that you see at evergreen, and that they feel is is is permeating the culture of Hollywood and the academy and our major institutions and our federal government even, that there needed to be somebody who stood in that gap, regardless of the sort of social chaos and political and governing chaos that he that he left in his wake. And for conservatives who think that way, I have the exact sort of same advice, you know, don't don't seek a short term destructive solution to what is a longer term sort of cultural and systematic problem. Ultimately, we need to create the foundation for the solutions to these deeper things. And a consensus arrived that within the American people in themselves, there's a political conversation about who we elect to be had on top of that, which I think allows for quite a bit of room for disagreement right now. But for there to be sort of a revival in our democratic or democratic culture, a shift in terms of how we see each other and how we work together, you know, that is the foundation upon which we will be able to absorb the negative impact of any candidate who might be elected to office who is more or less off off kilter in terms of how they choose to govern this nation, because the ultimate corrective force in the country has been in needs to be the American people themselves, you know, so putting our attention more on our relationships with one another, and less on the shiny object that is, you know,

**Bret** 1:44:17

the shiny orange

**John Wood Jr** 1:44:20

right, he really does have a shiny head of hair too

**Bret** 1:44:22

doesn't really like like, a unique person. He

**John Wood Jr** 1:44:24

is a unique person like bounces off of it like crazy. But to take our eyes off of the shiny object that is Donald Trump or Alexandria ocasio Cortez, you don't take your pick Yeah. That is a necessary thing. I think you know, for us to draw people's attention away from you know, the the the figures who arise as kind of the caricature urs of you know, who the enemy is on the other side, or who your champion is right. And to return it squarely to focus on the fact But really, this isn't a question of you and Donald Trump. This is a question of you and your neighbor. You know,

**Bret** 1:45:05

I see like that right? And just the question of you and your neighbor, right, and to see the connection between one and the other. Yeah, I love this framing. I have complex feelings about the President, I feel we are imperiled. I don't really feel like he's up to the challenge of the office. On the other hand, All right, let me try reaching across the aisle on this one, Donald Trump accomplished something that nobody else in recent memory has done that he broke through the duopoly. And that required somebody of a particularly unusual constitution. And we are now left with such a person in office, which has been an interesting experience to be sure. But to the extent that we were suffering from the duopoly and something broke through, it wasn't Bernie Sanders. Bernie Sanders was my guy in this fight. But he couldn't do it. And in the end, he folded to Clinton, which I must say, still leaves a bitter taste in my mouth, I think he should have stayed true to the fight. But Trump did manage to break through the duopoly which tells us in fact, that it is possible. And that is an important. If he's done nothing else, he has done that service for us, as he has demonstrated that the story that could not be disrupted by anything was, in fact, open to be challenged by somebody who was sufficiently politically savvy, which I think he is. I wanted to add one other thing goes back to a point you made early in this conversation about. It was about the content that is not analytical involved in the discussions across certain divides. And I've noticed the same thing. And in fact, it's been a conversation between Heather and me for many, many years. In fact, at least since we, Heather did her fieldwork for her dissertation in Madagascar, and I traveled with her on several of her excursions. Heather, for anybody listening is the smart one. Yes, she is my better half I don't know where we get that fraction. But anyway, she, she was working in Madagascar, and we had the pleasure of traveling now the pleasure and frustrations very frustrating country at traveling. But one thing that allows you to see your own culture is traveled to a culture that is sufficiently different from yours, that everything has to be engaged consciously. And so one thing that's true in Madagascar is that when people meet, they very typically, say in Volvo, which means, basically, What's the news? And the responses for me for? There's no news. And it's just like, Hey, what's up? Not much, right? It's not a big deal. It's in fact, not different from our culture. But because you're learning this language. That's so very foreign. You hear people saying, What's the news? There is no news. And it strikes you, this is such an odd tradition, right? But over time thinking about it, there is some value two exchanging absolutely meaningless, systematic readings with each other. And in my opinion, what the value of that is, is that it actually because there's no content in it, it allows you to evaluate the state of the person on the other side. And so for example, if you were to meet a close friend, somebody you knew well, and you said, What's up? And they said, Not much, very likely, you could detect if they were preoccupied with something very serious if they were in a frivolous mood, you could detect that because the content is always the same, which makes it impossible to hide the emotional background. And so anyway, my point here is that I suspect, evolutionarily, people have traditions that allow those with whom you have established trust, to read your mental state so that they can be more empathic so that they can you know, if you hear a friend say, Yeah, not much is up, but you can detect that something is up. He's acting on what's really up, right. Yeah. So my point in the context of your project, is that it might be very valuable to find some exercise that actually doesn't have any political content whatsoever, but allows people to sort of establish enough human basics that you know, I mean, I mentioned this to Chloe, Valerie, I just saw there's something about the way people online interact over pets Be it cats or dogs

**John Wood Jr** 1:50:00

unifying thing on the internet complete our love of kittens and puppies, right?

**Bret** 1:50:04

I mean, the fact is somebody you know, it almost doesn't matter what divides you, when you watch some dog do some particularly impressive or noble thing, you have a natural human reaction that doesn't depend on what culture you come from, or what your political biases are any of that stuff. So I wonder if there's not if there is not some work to be done establishing a set of traditions for the heterodox population, that just simply, I mean, I know I go to these parties and gatherings where people have accumulated in some number, and there is sort of a tenor to the conversation. Right, right. But we are not paying attention to Oh, that's Robbie George, he's a republican. Right? Nobody is thinking that they're evaluating each other on individual merits. There are tensions there are affinities, all of these things exist. But there is sort of a sense of like, geez, at least that other thing isn't at this party, right? At least nobody here is, you know, wagging their finger at somebody else because of who they voted for in the last election.

**John Wood Jr** 1:51:14

Yeah, yeah. Well, you know, we've had an annual convention for better angels national convention two years in a row. Now, better angels, by the way, sort of got its start in 2016. Immediately following the presidential election, that's when we had our first workshop. But it didn't really mature as an organization until, until into the spring or so of 2017, I believe. And we had our first annual convention 2018. And then again, St. Louis this year where we had among others. Tea Party leader, Ray Ward from Cincinnati and Hawk Newsome of Black Lives Matter engaged in a conversation that went over fabulously Well, with folks in the audience. But the well the delegates who attended, so we had 150 delegates or so from each side of the aisle, red and blue, come out to better and come out to the convention, not just to listen to conversations, but to actively participate in our workshop programs, and to deliberate on the content of better angels 2019 platform, which members of your audience can, can read it our website, where we outline the mission and the goals of the organization in over the course of over the course of 2019 and detail some of the various initiatives that we would be pursuing. That document was a product of a deliberative interaction between folks on both sides. Now, you know, you could say that this is, this is political, but it didn't really deal with political issues exactly dealt with our attempt to shift the culture, the participation in the programs, gives people the opportunity to dig into sort of personal subject matter and so forth, to establish these bonds of connection. But what was most powerful, really, and particularly as I listen to you speak, is for me to think about all of the things that happened in the space between those exercises, and those events, because our coalescing around the work of bringing Americans together, resulted in the small talk of bringing Americans together, right. And so there is this process of seeing a social language begin to kind of develop between groups of people who did not share one before and in coming together across the Gulf. And these perspectives are sort of in the process of inventing it, or maybe in some cases, rediscovering it, and it's hard to know whether it's more of one than the other. But there is a process of generating sort of the social language that ties us together, that is reflected in just sort of the way we say hello, or How's it going, you know, or, and that seems like the least important part of what we're doing, might actually be the most important part, because it's that starts to congeal, you see the the windows by which we're able to develop an intuitive appreciation for who we are, and a level of connection that allows us to sort of begin to feel comfortable, just kind of taking it for granted, that the person with whom I'm speaking is somebody who I share some level of humanity with. And some level of common interest that is not just technical or material, but earnestly felt from one person to the other. And so differences can arise on top of that rapport, but if you have that rapport underlying it, there becomes the space for grace, if you will, to accommodate you know, the tensions of disagreement that might arise and in a further conversation, and so, you know, restoring just sort of our our intuitive social appreciation Have one another is every bit as much of a vital outcome of the consolidation of this kind of movement as as anything else, because again, it's the little things that sustain us and social interaction. And those are the easiest things to forget.

**Bret** 1:55:17

And I think also, I'm not 100% sure, I believe this, but I think I do. Once you have seen somebody else's humanity, once an individual, you know, person can fake it in front of a camera. But if you've spoken with somebody, and you felt their humanity, it's very hard to unlearn that lesson. They might behave badly, they might disappoint you, but you don't forget that they're a person, right? So in some sense, establishing those bonds may be very durable once they're there, and very, very important. Well, john, this has been a terrific conversation. From my perspective. I thought it might be Yeah, I'm glad you thought we might by pull it off, I had no doubt. Now, where can people find you online?

**John Wood Jr** 1:56:02

Well, you can find me in a few different places, you can find me on Twitter at john R. Wood, Jr, I think is my handle. Find me john Jr. Or at john arwood, Jr. I find me better angels, the website is better dash angels.org just like it sounds. And I encourage any and all of your viewers to come on board and to join us as a member because you will get updates on our events on our programs, you'll get some of our media content, including if you don't mind me plugging my own podcast. No, you should actually, you know,

**Bret** 1:56:33

I was looking for it. And I have to tell you, I had trouble finding it. So it might be that there's something

**John Wood Jr** 1:56:39

could be okay, how do people find it? Who want to win? Right? Gotcha. Well, so it's so actually let me say that so we have the better angels podcast, which is co hosted by myself and my, my better angels colleague, Kieran O'Connor, where we talk about the issue of polarization itself interviews, certain high level folks, we've had Ezra Klein and Arthur Brooks and various people on the podcast, you can find that at the website, you should be able to find it on Apple, and iTunes, and wherever you get your podcasts, but I'll make sure, let's make sure the SEO stuff is working. I actually am launching a new podcast and my bad self marketer because I didn't mention that before when you ask. But I am launching the john wood Jr. show where I will be leaning in to basically the this this project of articulating a narrative of who we are as Americans that can evolve over time, right. And so my, my intention on the john Ward Jr. Show is to speak to this budding movement in the center of the American consciousness, if you will, and to tell a story about who we are, that leans a little bit into who I am, because I do come from a biracial and a multicultural and bipartisan sort of family background. And I've grown up seeing people cross these divides sometimes in ways that don't work, but frequently in ways that do and that endure, you know, I'm sort of a product of that my own kind of existence.

**Bret** 1:58:02

And that will be your focus on the john wood on the john john wood on the john wood Jr. Show. And it's not online yet. It's not up yet. That's why I couldn't find it. Oh, you were looking for the john. I saw a link to it on da angels. And then I went I tried to follow Yeah,

**John Wood Jr** 1:58:16

right. Okay, we are going to a little promo for it. It's not up yet. Right? Okay, indeed. So you will see the john wood Jr. Show up in a couple of weeks, if you want to hear that come on board as a member and, and come on board with us for the opportunity to meet people across the divide and to develop a sense of shared and shared America with folks that you wouldn't have an opportunity to explore it with otherwise, that's what we're doing tempting to create the structural hub of this movement that's going to heal the USA, and so be a part of it. everybody's watching.

**Bret** 1:58:46

Wonderful. Yeah. All right, john. From my part, I will say keep your eye out on the Dark Horse podcast, we are going to be starting a membership. The podcast will remain free but there will be some other things available to people who want to sign up. And in any case, I look forward to having john back as soon as he's ready to visit