

Bret Weinstein on Israel-Palestine, Antisemitism, and Jewish Identity - Part 2

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SUMMARY

The conversation features a deep exploration of faith, culture, and the complexities of human behavior through the lens of evolution. The speakers discuss the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, the implications of cultural evolution, and the current geopolitical tensions, particularly in the Middle East. They also touch on the challenges of navigating discussions about anti-Semitism and the broader implications of human group dynamics.

- The speaker identifies as agnostic, rejecting atheism while acknowledging the significance of religion in human culture.*
- Human beings uniquely exchange abstractions, allowing for rapid cultural evolution, unlike other species.*
- Christianity is viewed as an elaboration of Judaism, with cultural exchanges between the two traditions.*
- The speaker expresses concern about the resurgence of anti-Semitism linked to current geopolitical conflicts, particularly regarding Israel.*
- The conversation highlights the evolutionary basis for human behavior, including group dynamics and the tendency for lineage-based violence.*
- The complexities of the Middle East conflict are discussed, emphasizing the need for nuanced understanding rather than simplistic narratives.*
- The impact of modern comforts on psychological well-being is examined, suggesting that humans struggle to adapt to a world without the challenges faced by their ancestors.*
- The discussion concludes with a call to appreciate the miraculous nature of human existence and the importance of coexistence.*

Um I you you know last time we we're together um we talked about faith and we don't need to rehash that conversation but like I know you you know as of now I think you you consider yourself an agnostic. Is that still true? Is that correct? Is that a fair assumption? Well, this gets complicated because um I refuse to use the term atheist. Um mostly because I'm pissed at what the atheists have done, but I don't believe in anything supernatural. Um I'm open to the possibility if I saw evidence I I could be persuaded, but I haven't seen it and I don't expect to. That said, I am perfectly comfortable with the fact that religion exists for a very important reason and I also don't I find nothing negative about what you're saying regarding the connection between the west and what you're calling Christendom, but I would like to add something to it.

>> Sure. >> So, human beings are a very interesting product of evolution. We have a capacity that no other creature does to exchange abstractions between minds. And that facilitates a kind of evolution that we see the rudiments of in some other creatures, but nothing nothing like humans. And so I'm trying not to make a stupid biological error, which is why I'm being what must seem overly precise here, but we have other animals that

have culture.

In fact, all mammals and almost all birds have some culture. And then we have a few Greek uh creatures like orcas and uh crows and uh wolves that have substantial amounts of culture, but humans have it elaborated at a totally new level. And the the important feature of culture is that although culture is usually transmitted vertically parent to offspring, it can move horizontally which is something genes don't do. So it is a special it is an evolutionary innovation that allows for rapid change.

>> Mimemetic mimemetic spread. >> Mimemetic spread. But what that means is if we take what we know from biology from looking at other creatures and we point that lens at humans and then we try not to make any stupid errors. We find the following thing. Let's just take the relationship between Jews and Christians. Okay. >> Sure. Phogetically speaking, Christians are the most successful group of Jews phoggenetically.

Right? So the point is the branch, the Judeo-Christian branch has a number of subbranches. The Christian branch is by far the largest and it dwarfs all the rest of the branches put together just in terms of the number of people who adhere to it. But nonetheless, they're not different traditions. One is an outgrowth and it involves just as every branch on the tree of life involves novel innovations that didn't exist in the root. >> Yeah. So, Christianity is an elaboration of Judaism and therefore phoggenetically speaking all Christians are Jews.

Modern Jews are also Christians in the cultural sense. Modern Jews have adopted things from Christianity and built them into the modern Jewish tradition even if they don't acknowledge it. >> What do you mean by modern Jews? Do you mean Jew? Do you just mean to the present day population of Jews? Do you mean um more like religiously or philosophically people who are more reformed? What do you mean by modern Jews? >> Uh I'm trying to be vague about it so I don't trip over anything. But let's just say not not all existing Jews, what we would say extant Jews are modern. Some are backwards looking. But most Jews who exist today are modern in the sense that they do interact reciprocally uh with others. And maybe the place to really see it has to do with um monogamy, right? Monogamy is a New Testament phenomenon.

>> Yes. And modern Jews live by it. >> Interesting. Yes. >> So the point is we've adopted it because it's good. right? It makes the world better. And this is the beauty of culture is that you can take stuff from another culture that's good and you can move it horizontally into your own culture. So anyway, my my point is if we if we take the same ideas that we use to understand the relationship between other organisms and we apply that to humans, we find a complex relationship between Christians, Jews, other religions, and it's not clean because culture moves between these branches freely.

All right, I'll keep this quick. This is actually the second half of a very long conversation I had with Brett Weinstein. He is back on the show after him and Heather were on last year. And I don't want you to miss what's coming up or what was already released last week. So, be sure to remember to subscribe to the channel and after you're done watching or listening to this, check out the prior one. And with that, let's get into it.

And I think you know Islam should be understood the way I understand Islam is frankly as a kind of Christian

heresy that it's Muhammad. There's this there's an idea in Islam uh in in the discourse around Islam called the Islamic dilemma which is that the Quran asserts that we should um accept the the Bible as in the old and new testaments that you know which is and including the gospels and as true and and adhere to them and then it also in the same book the Quran makes assertions that are in direct direct clear violation of what the gospels actually say. This is called the Islamic dilemma.

But I bring that up not to go off onto theology and get out past our skis so much as to say, you know, these are these are still three Abrahamic traditions that are offshoots. And I think Islam is understood should be understood as as an offshoot of the same tree. >> Right? And I think that this is it's a very uncomfortable way especially for religious people to confront these questions. But I think as a biologist I wish that people could get past their discomfort about using these tools because the tools are indifferent to the subject matter. Right? We use the same tools to talk about plants as we do to talk about lizards because the tools are built to be general in this way.

If you make if you take special precautions not to trip over the few features of humans that cause these tools to have to be used slightly differently. They're very useful in this regard because let's put it to you this way. Nobody gets bent out of shape if we point phlogenetic tools at languages, >> right? >> Yeah. >> Languages are >> branch everything, you know. Oh, okay. So now now you've got cochnney versus this. You've got southern English in America and the southern dialects.

You've got African-American dialect which is a distinct thing and it is very much a distinct thing. No different than you know uh no different than the the dialect of people in Staten Island which are very which is very particular, right? And so if you do that then you get a big bang for your buck when you start looking at religions because religions function in exactly this way. In the same way that we can say oh well you know this word shows up in this branch of this tree and then divides into two different words in these dialects. We can say this belief you know starts with Jesus standing you know on the mount right that the power that comes from understanding you know and then you know Martin Luther nails his 95 thesis to the church door and you get a bunch of new branches right of people who aren't comfortable with the pope and so anyway that viewpoint allows us to crack changes in not just belief which is abstract but behaviors which are materially important. And this is what I'm saying about the conflict in the Middle East. The conflict in the Middle East is important to me because life and death and territory is at stake in a way that what I haven't said and maybe I've said it to you elsewhere or before is the putting lineage aside way of behaving which you're saying begins in Christrysendom.

I don't disagree. Story of the good Samaritan, the golden rule, these are the rudiments of that way of being, which I think is simply better irrespective of who you are. Um, >> by its fruits, you know it, and its fruits have been very, very good. >> I mean, that's just the thing is that once you do, when the west works, anybody who sees it wants to be part of it because it's so productive and dynamic and vibrant. And who actually wants to be worried, you know, about their neighbor because their neighbors nose is shaped differently or, you know, it it's just a better way of being. But the problem is that because the lineage versus lineage displacement mode is the mode that lasted for literally billions of years until there was an alternative.

We default to it. we fall back into it very easily. And so I'm looking at the Middle East with terror that what is happening there is an outbreak of lineage against lineage violence that is connected to the rest of the world in ways that it threatens to drag us in so that we will we will fall back into this mode. And you know, I don't want to live in the Old Testament, right? I just don't. And you shouldn't either. If you love your children, you shouldn't want to live there either. And it doesn't mean I don't think there's a great deal of wisdom in that book. There is. But there's also a lot of stuff that should not govern the way we behave towards each other.

And you know, I don't like saying that because I know a lot of people are going to look at that and say, well, there, you know, there's the blasphemy. But I'm sorry. We as modern people come from a lot of different traditions and we have to decide how to live. And there is one better way. I'm not telling you I know the details of it. But the better way is we start putting aside what our genes want us to do and we start behaving like uh like adults who are capable of deciding.

And anyway, I'm I'm I'm very frightened that the Middle East will drag us back into something from which we won't return. I mean, it's um it's such a it's so fraught and it's a fraught thing to try to grapple with in the same conversation as dark forces at work in relation to the Jeffrey Epstein story, right? for obvious reasons. The there you know the there are among the dark forces that people assert is that he was an agent of MSAD and that the relationship between the United States and the government of Israel is um is problematic and then off of that shoots all kinds of stuff. You you know you you're a open open but agnostic person of Jewish descent. Um there's a lot of anti-semitic things that are legitimately anti-semitic.

There's a lot of weaponization of the word anti-semitism uh to to to just try to have thought terminating um attacks on discourse. Um you know is there can you navigate some of that bluntly? Is it because because I you know because here's the thing like I one of the things I try to do in these conversations is just be myself which tends to be a mix of high-minded and philosophical and like blunt Jersey guy.

And the blunt Jersey guy part of me is like look you got like Candace Owens out there going off the rails about how the Jews control the world and others playing footsie with that. and and um and it's and one of the things that is I I just was at this event in Washington state and Gad Sad was there and he was talking about this because this is something he talks about quite a bit and it's like well multiple things can be true at the same time. It can be true that um that that that that Jewish people throughout our modern history have been remarkably successful in ways that are incredibly off-putting. Like just pointing to like pointed out like the percentage of Nobel Prize winners. I think it's something like 25% of Nobel Prize winners are of Jewish descent. And that is pretty crazy when you think about it as a share of population. And there's only like 15 million Jews on planet Earth right now. That's really remarkable. And so there's different ways you can interpret that. One is nefarious like there's some cabal conspiracy, dark forces.

One is well, you have a culture that uh that go has given rise and preserved over the years for a whole host of reasons. an intense focus on the intellectual and on learning and it is lionized and it and that it and that it has it has baked into identity also in the face of constant threat of extermination which I think has been an intensifier culturally and so there's a pretty benign way to understand why you have such impressive Jewish people in this

world that doesn't involve being the source of all of everyone's problems everywhere and the dark puppet masters.

I mean, this is the really uncomfortable stuff to talk about. Um, and [Music] but the same at the same time, it's like this is this weapon. this is this tool that gets used to say well see Jeffrey Epstein that's all part of the like Rothschild's conspiracy and blah blah blah like there you're you're operating in a space and use that that that is um navigating these kinds of choppy waters that's why I'm bringing all this stuff up because when you talk about I'm worried about Jeffrey Epstein because there are dark forces that are globalists that are controlling the world that don't care about borders there's a lot of places you can take what that could look like And all I care about is what's true. And and um and I don't think uh I haven't seen the I haven't seen the the grand evil Jewish conspiracy to be true. So I think that's false. I think that that's um I think that that's the old ways reasserting themselves into that kind of conversation.

But how are you navigating that? Because you can't you know that's a buzzsaw that's sitting right next to your right next to what you're talking about. Yeah, it's uh I mean, let's put it this way. I I do find something uh concerning about the fact that this is it. It's somehow the one conversation that feels perilous to have. Um but let me let me again I think my job in in life is um to not fall into the you know in bowling you got the two gutters and I'm trying to not go into the gutters >> literally and well there's that too but um the I think we have a problem in the following sense I No, I was born in 1969, 25 years after the end of World War II.

In my childhood, World War II seemed an awfully long time in the past. I now realize it wasn't terribly long in the past, but I was definitely raised uh it was a secular Jewish upbringing, but I was raised with the message, you better believe it can happen here. and don't do what the people who got killed did, which is told themselves it'll get better. Weather the storm, blah blah blah. So, okay, that's a hell of a thing to grow up knowing, if knowing is even the right word. Right? The population that you feel a part of can turn on you.

Okay? It has a lot to do with how I came to be who I am actually. Just that simple piece of knowledge. So let's imagine that that's pretty widespread that that amongst Jews that's a lesson that gets taught and that if you get it, it shapes you. Then how does that alter your interaction with others? Right? Do you go through your life thinking that everybody you meet who isn't Jewish is potentially uh going to stand by as you're marched off onto a cattle car.

Right? So the point is it creates a distance. Knowing that it can happen anywhere, knowing that it repeatedly happens to Jews creates a distance with others. That distance causes a tendency to behave in a clanish way to think in us and them terms. And you can see where this is going. That in effect we have a population that has suffered repeated persecution and has been shaped by that repeated persecution which then behaves in ways that view things in an us and them mode which then results in others thinking, "Hey, wait a minute. Why am I being viewed as them?" And so it is both causal of the mindset and contributing to the trigger.

So my perspective on what's going on in the Middle East is that the I mean first of all I don't like living downstream of the policy of the state of Israel. Right. I'm not an Israeli. I'm an American. I'm a patriotic

American. I want Israel to succeed. I like the idea of Israel, but I'm concerned that it comes to be seen as speaking for and acting on behalf of Jews globally. And that means that when it behaves badly, there's a responsibility that flows to people like me who have zero influence over it. So I mean that's literally that's obviously true. Like the the impacts on Jewish populations across the West as a result of of the conflict there there is an is is a fact.

It is a fact. It is not a what what's happened on college campuses um is a fact. So So you're right. You're right that it matters. You're right that you can't really escape it as a Jew as a as a as someone of Jewish descent. Yeah. I can't I can't escape it. And it makes me very uncomfortable because I'm watching an administration that I think is betraying the Jews of Israel and also the Jews of the diaspora.

It is taking all of the goodwill that I know existed towards Jews in the aftermath of World War II and I feel like it's being burned in the space of a decade. And I also know what that is likely to produce, which is it's going to revive the pattern of history in which uh Jews are demonized. And it's going to it's going to return us to a place that if we were wise, we would invest everything in avoiding.

And you know, so at some level I know logically that the fact that somebody is Israeli doesn't mean that they are on Benjamin Netanyahu's team anymore than I was on Joe Biden's. But empirically speaking, Israel has rallied around Netanyahu, who is behaving in ways that I think are right to cause concern. And frankly, what I said in the immediate aftermath of October 7th was, you have to get rid of this guy.

This guy literally advocated for the supporting of Hamas to defide the Palestinians, right? He cynically wanted to support Hamas to divide the Palestinians. The Palestinians have a right to be absolutely livid with him because he stuck them with Hamas. Now, maybe what he did was inept and small and they would have stuck themselves with Hamas anyway, but we don't know that. What we know is that he cynically wanted to support Hamas and now Hamas has engaged in this horrifying behavior.

So my feeling is in order to prosecute the war responsibly, you needed to get rid of Benjamin Netanyahu. That should have been job one. And I'm I'm very troubled by the fact that it didn't happen. But even if you don't accept that, the fact that he presided over the frankly unimaginable failure of Israeli security that allowed the attacks to occur also means he can't be the person in charge of the war against Hamas. So, I'm now left with Israel has rallied around a leader that I, you know, I know from the COVID era is somebody I don't trust any farther than I can throw him and frankly I suspect is not a well-intentioned human. But they've rallied around him and that means that the the war is being prosecuted under the leadership of a person of very questionable moral character. And that is that sets this up for um to be very triggering to those who are prone to have suspicions about Jews. So, I'm watching something awful unfold, which is, you know, a very um avoidable set of errors in the Middle East is resulting in a radical shift in the way um Jews are understood, which I, you know, is making things radically worse. I'm seeing a tremendous amount of anti-semitism. I'm also seeing a tremendous amount of legitimate questions about the relationship between the United States and Israel. Those are questions we have to be free to ask and those two things of course get intermingled.

Um and my feeling is you know we had it pretty good and behaving as you know honorable patriotic members

of our societies is a perfectly good way to be and it did not involve you being any less Jewish and now I see the thing unraveling as the result of the behavior of fools and I resent it. There's a lot there, Brett. Um, it's admirable that you feel you can talk about this in this way just because it is so difficult and it puts you at odds with a lot of people across a lot of dimensions that where you're otherwise an ally, right? puts me at odds with everybody unfortunately because the fact is most people use a rubric in which you either agree with me or you're on the other side and since what I'm saying is not something others are saying everybody views me as on the other side which I also resent that I feel it is incumbent on us to attempt to figure out what is true rather than to imagine that everything is a team sport and you and decide who's good and who's bad, who's smart and who's dumb simply by what jersey they're wearing.

>> I um I'm thinking about whether to share the way I think about this in the sense that like fundamentally this show and my focus is not really foreign policy and my own opinions about foreign policy are the areas where I have the least amount of confidence that my opinion is worth anything. I mean there's we should always be worried that our opinion is probably not worth nearly as much as we want it to be. But in an area where distance and complexity and unfamiliarity and the likelihood that my sources are compromised in terms of how I understand things, it just makes it very very difficult. So I'll I want to offer a couple reactions to what you said >> please. Uh so one is to come back to the question of our culture and um and and um how to think about the Jews in a world where we have rising anti-semitic actual behavior. Not like people saying I'm not I'm not using that word the way internet trolls use it. I mean like hatred of a group of people on the basis of their identity. Let me let me uh let me stop you there and just say that before October 7th, I did something on Twitter, and I'm not sure what it was that caused the algorithm to expose me to something that I then became quite alarmed about and talked about on my podcast, which I called Nazi Twitter. And my point was there's a corner of Twitter that if you don't trigger the algorithm in a particular way, you're not going to understand that it's even there in which Hitler is being rehabilitated, right? The this the idea that we have World War II upside down, that the Holocaust isn't the story you think it is, that is being described and discussed openly and it's invisible to most people. So, I have now seen that that quadrant of Twitter has now spilled over and the mainstream is interacting with it. But believe me, uh the anti-semitism is out there. It's real and it's very dangerous because it's a revival of of an ancient way of viewing Jews. We know where it goes.

>> Yeah. So, I um on that score, I'm very very worried about that. I have a personal stake in it in that I just have a lot of Jewish people in my life that I that I love and care about. I I came not that far from potentially marrying an Orthodox Jewish girl. So I I read about the the the I I was asked to convert as a condition of that which I didn't obviously do. I married my wife who is Italian and Catholic. So, I was very much like I lived the birds of a feather, uh, you know, old ways you could say. But I have a strong affinity for for Jewish people in general, for the Jewish people overall. I just do. People can hate that. Too bad. Um, I'm an East Coast guy. Um, so the way I what there's a but there's a couple things that I think just get lost in the discourse on this as it's gotten so coarse, the coarse discourse.

One is, as I understand it, if you go to Israel and you actually pick up the newspapers in Israel or look at actually Israeli discourse, you find a really wide a wider range of opinions. And I've known this to be true since before uh 107 because uh on everything you've got you've got people who are you've got just the widest possible range of opinions about what's going on even given the support even kind of even in spite of what happened in 107

which if you normalize for for 911 would be something like 10x 911 in terms of share of population.

Um, so, so to treat the Jews like a monolith, and I'm not saying that's what you're doing, but I'm saying out there in the world of conversation about the Middle East, about Jewish people, about Jews on college campuses, to treat the Jews as a monolith is just good old collectivist gobbledygook. It's garbage. It's not true. That's not a thing. to create conspiracy theories in which the Jews do things is just an outgrowth of that exact same sort of I would call it tribal communist gobbledygook. I'm going to treat a group of people like a monolith, like a blob that all share a mind like the Borg somehow.

Even culture, class, and tribal affinities notwithstanding. So I think that's the most important um thing for that I would want the viewer listener to to to remind themselves of we have to take people at the as individuals as they come and be aware of this wiring that leads us to make generalizations that are just technically false. They're false as soon as you spend any time looking. There is no such thing as what the Jews think anymore than what Americans think. It's just that that's that's linguistic garbage. It's it's too low resolution. It doesn't capture the reality. So that's number one. I think the the broader thing about the Middle East and how to think about the policy there, I I don't I don't know. I just the history is such so messy. Uh I don't know. I don't I don't you know my my my default opinion is is a little different than yours in this way and we can sort of move on from this pretty quickly if you want because it's not worth very much. I'm going to I'm going to throw out a a story that I am wide open to have beat to here's how I understand the conflict there as someone who really doesn't have skin in the game even the way like you do except as American and being concerned about what my government gets tied up in uh in this ties back to the bigger picture of the question of borders nation states what are what's the reality of the power structures of our world at the start of our conversation So, as I understand it, if we take ourselves back to World War I, you have an Ottoman Empire, and that region isn't drawn the way it is now.

Um, and then the Ottomans lose in World War I and the French and British have a mandate to to divest themselves ultimately of their governance of this area that they have conquered in victory. And so they start drawing a bunch of lines. They create this thing called Iraq and Lebanon and and Trans Jordan and and so you create all these things and you also at the same time have a broader movement towards post colonial or push back on the colonial powers that gives rise to a bunch of other nation states like Pakistan which didn't exist. There was no Pakistan. So you had you know British controlled India and out of the out of the that time period you have the rise of all these nation states and it is fairly awful the process across the board. The creation of Pakistan involves millions of people moving in both directions along ethnic lines killing each other quite a bit as they do such that you end up with an Islamic Pakistan and a Hindu India and then some unresolved conflict area in in Kashmir much like Jerusalem. But that thing that process which is very connected to the beginning of our conversation about borders and tribes and identity lineages etc that is enforced there and among them is the creation of the the current state of Israel which had Jews there from the beginning and as I understand it most of the lands that came to be owned by The Jews there were purchased by Jews who moved mostly over time from the surrounding Middle Eastern countries like Iraq and Lebanon and this broader area called Trans Jordan and the Sinai.

Um but that that that's actually mostly what happened overwhelmingly so. And so you have a kind of

interesting thing in Israel where relative to all of the nation state creation out there, it is certainly not worse in terms of bloody disasters than all the other nation state creations. It seems to get treated like it's worse for reasons that are either explicitly just because it's the Jews or maybe there's something else. But it sure seems weird. It seems weird to me that we're obsessed about this on our college campuses. This country that was created along with a lot of other countries, most of which were Islamic, not like like it's like what are we going to do about the Palestinians? It's like, well, what are you talking about? The mandate created Jordan, like an entire Islamic Arab country. So, there was no Palestinians. That was not a thing. That was concocted in the 1960s. That was an identity formed in opposition as part of a political project because they didn't want the Jews there. I think that's true. Now, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe maybe I'm like propagandized by Israeli propagandists. Maybe my Jewish friends have convinced me of a history that's very lopsided. But I I I don't think so. I think so. So So why do I tell this long story, you know, in this kind of lowresolution way? Because I just find the the way Americans and Western people are doing battle with each other in our politics and on our college campuses and with our kids because all of our kids have opinions about this. They're all getting hit with this story constantly. That's how dad saves America. As a dad, I know like my son came home from his first year of college and this was something he was talking about. So that's part of the reasons why I can justify talking about this. Um, and I just find it to be weird and strange. I understand why you care about it so much. You have a stake in it as a as a Jewish person, but as a conflict, it's like half a million people died in the Syrian civil war. There's a Yemen thing going on that's killing half a million people. And there's nobody on our college campuses talking about that at all. They're just not talking about it. It's like, what about It's like, oh, the the horror of Gaza. Yeah, Gaza's horrible. It doesn't even hold a candle to the half million dead in Yemen. Why aren't you angry about that? I think I know why. I think I know why. And so, if I can I know I'm getting a little histrionic, and I acknowledge that, but this is the part of this issue that to me, I just that's how I understand it. It's like it sure just looks like a lot of Jew hatred, and I'm not on board with that. And I don't want the US to get involved. It's not our country. Um but but I don't know as someone who I'm just looking at this not like I don't have skin in the game the way you do literally in a sense. It doesn't impact me in the same way, but it impacts me in the sense that it is having profound impacts on our politics, on our kids, on the way our kids are seeing Jewish people. And it's all become this mega movement and Palestine is at the center of this mega movement. And it that and that to me points to something else that's I think is kind of nefarious and sounds like some kind of Islamo communist assault on the country. That's that's my conspiracy theory is that this is all we're being divided around this as part of something darker that is among other things pushing people like Zoran mom Donnie on us who also ironically is being funded by George Soros. So figure that one out.

Like I maybe maybe I've maybe I've gone off the rails here, but I mean how do you to put a point a fine point on it? Um I think I understand your position. I understand your concern. Um maybe we can spend more time a little bit to unpack where you maybe see I got where you think I'm wrong. But just as the matter as a matter of like well what the way nation states work. I understand what the Jews are doing. I understand what Netanyahu is doing. And even if he put money behind Hamas and pulled the troops off the border so that that so that this attack would happen. Kind of like FDR sort of knew that Pearl Harbor was coming. That doesn't absolve the people that did it. They still did it.

And I I I don't I don't know. It's like, should they even have given back any of these lands after defeating the the Arab onslaught in 1967? Probably not. That was sure weird. That was a weird decision. Why would you do

that? Like the the history here is kind of crazy to me. And it always seems like um the Jews take it on the chin for every step they take in this matter. And it's happened with the with our with with kids on college campuses. I first I I talked about this a couple years back when it first happened. It's like I I'm just kind of horrified by the response and I still am to this day. It's more understandable because of the grinding war. And I'm not trying to be unempathetic to the victims, but there's just grinding war with victims in other places to a much larger extent.

And I just don't get it. I think there's something else here that's gross. Um, what do you say to all that? >> Well, look, I detect the gross thing that you're talking about and I don't disagree. Uh, but I I want to go back and pick up on a couple of threads in there that I think will resolve it. One, I'm sure I have an extra something in this story because I'm Jewish. There's definitely a way in which I personally resent uh being dragged into something that I have no say over.

But I'm mostly preoccupied with the story as a human being. >> I think this story has the danger of undoing the human project and I'm not okay with that. So I in many ways I wish that I was not Jewish in order to be able to discuss this and not have my Jewishness distract from the point I'm trying to make about the hazard here. Right? There's no part of me that doesn't like being Jewish.

I'm fine with it. But for the purposes of this discussion, I'd be better off if I wasn't. But to your other point, your observation about the fact that in Israel you have a much wider range of opinion than you do here in the US. >> Yeah, >> I find that conspicuous and troubling. I've also come to understand the very same thing. There's a very wide range of opinions tolerated in Israel and somehow not tolerated here in the US.

>> Oh, for sure. And just to be clear, the the person that first told me this was my cousin who is um works in the Catholic church and was there as part of a Catholic uh excursion. And he came back and said, "Here's something that was just so striking to me is that it just wow, there's a lot that we we just get like a tiny drip of the discourse from a very particular angle here." >> Well, I don't see it that way. I feel that in the US it's not that we get a tiny drip and it's you know distorted in its narrowness. It's that we are punished for stepping out of line which is frankly absolutely unamerican. I'm entitled to have an opinion on the foreign policy of any nation I care to have an opinion on. The fact that it happens to be Israel and I happen to be Jewish is immaterial. I'm an American.

Who's punishing you? >> Um, well, the chorus, right? If if I express an opinion like Israel is in danger of dragging us back into the Old Testament, Benjamin Netanyahu is a terrifying person who causes any military action in Gaza to be illegitimate. right now. Maybe I'm wrong about that, but I'm allowed to have that opinion. But if I express that opinion, then the problem is I am somehow betraying Jews who are, don't you know, in danger of pgrams and holocausts and uh all sorts of horrors.

No, I'm as aware of those things as anyone, and I'm actually trying to prevent those things from unfolding. Yes. for Jews, for others as well. By pointing out that this is an evolutionary dynamic, we are talking about human populations displacing other human populations because that is what the genes are driving them to do. Genes, frankly, I they are squarely within my professional wheelhouse. I'm telling you, the genes want something that

most people do not understand that the genes want. It's not a desirable something.

It's not a tolerable something. It is simply what the genes have been programmed to get us to do by evolution over the course of literally billions of years. So, I'm trying to raise an alarm about a uh a defect in our very selves that is leading to historical events that are intolerable. I don't want to compare one atrocity to another, Yemen to Gaza. I can't do it. I'm not expert. But my point is what I see going on is intolerable and it is going to not only continue a uh an abhorrent cycle but it is actually triggering a positive feedback in which Jews are seeing things in a narrower way and the rest of the world is seeing Jews in this way and it leads to somewhere that we know well from history. So what is the mechanism that allows me to get enough leash that I can say, "Hey, you're actually dealing with an evolutionary question." I hear hours and hours and hours of exposition on Gaza and Israel and the Middle East, and I never hear anybody mention evolution. It's an evolutionary question. And you know what? If you knew what evolutionary question it was, you'd think about it differently, and we'd have a chance of making the world safer.

So, I want enough leash to get there. And every time I try to go in the direction of saying, "Hey, it's not the question you think it is. The point is this is not the time for that, Brett. Don't you realize the Jews are in danger?" And I'm sick of it. I I hear you loud and clear on that. And and or I think I do. I want to think that I do. Maybe I don't. Um you when you you say evolutionary, you know, one a simpler way to say it might just be, you know, in our it's in our nature. Our groupishness is just fundamentally in our nature.

>> No, no, no. Look, I I I want I want to make this I want to make this clear because I I think I know what you're struggling with. >> Yeah. Please help me. Let me just give you an example that's going to sound wrong. Okay? You know from what evolution you undoubtedly studied in high school or wherever that genes predispose us to to be and to behave in ways that increase the likelihood that those genes will move forward into the future. Okay?

>> And I've read the selfish gene and stuff, too. So, I've gone a little deeper than just high school, but >> nothing nothing controversial nothing controversial about it at that level. However, those genes well in our book, Heather and I say that genes have unbridled ambition and zero vanity. Okay, the genes will do absolutely anything that increases their likelihood of getting into the future and they do not care whether or not they produce any effect that we can see. A gene that causes your skin to be dark is perfectly happy to be silent if it's more likely to get into the future if your skin is light. Okay, so that's counterintuitive. We think the genes want to do their thing and be seen. They don't care. What they want to do is get into the future, whether that's by silence or screaming or murder.

So what genes want to get into the future? All of them. What they want to do is exclude genes that are spelled differently that can inhabit the same location in the genome. Okay? So that means that I've got enzymes that are responsible for detoxifying things in my liver and those genes for those enzymes will do anything to get into the future, including commit murder. And they will commit murder of somebody who has genes spelled differently in those same locations.

even if the genes of the person that my genes would conspire to murder are superior. In other words, if I have a spelling for my gene for Billy Rubin and somebody else has a gene that makes Billy Rubin more effectively using less energy or needing fewer molecules to accomplish the same amount of enzymatic work. My genes don't care. All they care is that the alternative spelling is a hazard to them. And they may be especially interested in murdering the alternative if that alternative superiority might give it an advantage in displacing me.

So what I'm telling you is that there is a program built into every single person that is designed to view the world in frightened, hostile terms based on the spelling of genes that no rational person could possibly care about. Right? I'm talking about being programmed to commit murder over something you don't care about. So that tendency to come up with stories to justify the destruction of people who hold different genetic spellings in their cells is what I'm concerned is going to cause humanity's undoing.

>> I um and we don't have time in this conversation to to to veer all the way into the way you you to the conversation you had about AI, although I see a correlary here pretty strongly, right? which is so you had this round table on this diary of a CEO that I think is worth watching um that then and I we were talking before we got started that like my parents watched it and were like unnerved um by it by your concerns but it's got a similar thing and we're and with a similar type of um word which is want say your your genes want and I think when it comes to what AI in future what what large language models or subsequent technologies that enable action you know what the AIs might want is things we're talking about now there's this AI 2027 story that someone very worried about the future path has laid out was a paper released earlier this year laying out a case in which AIs get sufficiently advanced that they selfimprove and come to at least act as if they want something like they have valition.

And I guess this is my this is this is my question is is that we say this term want knowing it's kind of an analogy. It's it's it's low it's not real. It's not necessarily true. It's not the >> it's actually it's actually wrong. >> I I I would I will I can fix it, but I agree with you. It's wrong. >> Yeah. So it's it's much like learning. We're using these human words that we understand by way of ourselves. Now, some people don't think we want things really because if you're a determinist fundamentally, you don't think there's free will. You don't even think like, you know, we tunnel into the questions of like where is consciousness, what are we, where do our desires and wants come from?

But when I hear this description of genes, both in the way you're telling right now and that of like Dawkins and the selfish gene and the selfishness, the wanting, the desire at the genetic level, I don't understand it. And I think it's an analogy. I think it's a a using of this term which is a human word like I want another glass of water that's not really want in the same way. So what do you mean when you say the my Billy Rubin producing, you know, parts of my DNA want something? There's no brain. The DNA doesn't have a brain. The gene doesn't have a brain. How does it want anything? Well, oddly, the the DNA does have a brain. It's your brain. Um, so basically the GN the DNA, the same DNA that causes the Billy Robin gene, it's part of a genome that does produce a brain. And so look, >> so you're so just just to make sure I understand what you're getting.

>> M is is the answer partly that Well, no, no, no. I'm narrowing down on the gene, but the gene is part of a

complex that informs your desires as the whole human. How is that is that the right way to think about this or >> let me let you're in the right track but the fact is you're looking for something that's going to run through your fingers like water and I'd like it actually to stick instead. Okay, because what I'm really describing is the mundane stuff of life and I'm just standing in a place that you don't usually look at it from.

Okay, so first of all, Dawkins and I disagree over this lineage versus lineage displacement stuff. I for the life of me cannot figure out why he doesn't see it. His books are full of the exact logic necessary and when I have talked to him about it, he becomes irrational. But nonetheless, just be aware that Dawkins, as much as you see Dawkins and me talking in the same sort of genetic language, I agree with Dawkins language and I think the selfish gene is one of the most important books that a person should read to become educated. But when I have talked to him about human populations attempting to displace each other for this reason, um, he has disappointed me.

>> Um, and I'm perfectly willing to talk to him about it. I would love to. In fact, he has dodged that invitation multiple times. Uh, Jordan Peterson wanted to have me moderate between them. Dawkins flatly refused. So anyway, I I would love to have this conversation because I think the world stands to benefit from it. But nevertheless, Dawkins in I believe the selfish gene says something very intelligent at the beginning where he says in order to talk about evolution well we have to talk in a kind of shorthand he may even use this exact example of talking about genes wanting something.

Genes of course do not want anything. So we have to always check that we can go back and write it out in the longhand version if called upon to do so. So the longhand version in this case is something like the genes predispose us to function as if they want. Right now that's a very cumbersome way of speaking and so you can see why we don't like doing it. But the basic point is your genes of which you have something like 20,000 active genes. Your genes collaborate in a project that is you including your brain. Mhm.

>> Your brain is very unusual amongst brains in nature because it is mostly uh it is as unpreprogrammed as any species has ever been. It is not a blank slate, but it is as blank as a slate ever gets. And what that means is that there's a whole bunch of cognitive material that is passed not from the the DNA but passed in an entirely separate pathway that causes you to act in the interests of your genes. This is the point on which this is the reason that Dawkins and I disagree over the lineage versus lineage violence point.

He thinks that cultural evolution is independent of genetic evolution. I think it quite clearly cannot be. It has to do the bidding of genetic evolution. And therefore the punchline of this story and the reason that you will be glad you put up with it I think is that the substance of something like a religious tradition is an evolutionary adaptation which predisposes us to act in ways that have served our genomes.

Now in many ways having served our genomes is an excellent thing because it's brought us to the present. It has endowed us with all of our characteristics, good and bad, our tendency to commit violence and genocide. Equally, our compassion and our ability to envision a better future. These are all means to an end of our genes trying to get into the future. And the point is, how do we get into the future? Well, really there are two ways.

One way involves collaborating with those who bring something to the table. The other way involves displacing people whose genes are spelled differently. Those two futures are so radically different in their quality and frankly their survivability that if we understand them as alternatives, we can only pick the one and we should fear anything that pulls us towards the other. That's why I'm focused on this. No, I don't think your Billy Ruben gene thinks anything. But your Billy Rub Ruben gene is present here in 2025 because it has successfully predisposed us towards things that lead to the future.

And the idea that your genome will do that, the way genomes get into the future is they displace other genomes. And they do so irrespective of the content of those genomes. They do it because what is frightening about the other is that it can use these resources and then I won't have them. The it's it's a it's a provocative way to think about this. I don't I I will live with this and think about this for a time for some time for sure.

The thing that I'm struggling with perhaps is that and maybe this puts me for now, not that my opinion is worth a damn on here. I am I I don't have the expertise to necessarily know how to think about it. I think where maybe I I lean towards Dawkins maybe. I don't know if that's even true is you know we were talking about the spread of Christianity earlier >> and and the sense in which you could look at it as this success this evol this sort of social mimetic cultural evolutionary success story of Judaism that's one way to look at it in in a certain sense um but like all of the early Christians were under constant murderous assault Mhm.

>> And so the success of Christianity spread is pretty crazy. Now I am a Catholic that actually believes fundamentally in the truth claims of Catholicism right down to the resurrection of Christ which is supernatural in its in what it claims. um if you want to call it supernatural, you know. So leaving aside a a like a debate about that, it still is crazy that and does and seems like a counterpoint for this religion to orient to to originate um in the time that it did under a dominion of a Roman Empire that saw it as a threat and sought to extinguish it murderously.

That just seems like it's at odds with the genetic survival, therefore cultural survival story. Like, well, these they were just stringing up Peter and Paul and all of his friends and all of the people he couldn't come in contact with. And yet, again, much like much like the Jews into the present, but at a at a scope that is astonishing because it it's f it it it did decouple from the genetic lineage. just said, "No, I don't care." I mean, it's Paul. It's like, "No, gentile or Jew, you know, uh um you know, slave or free, man or woman, you're all you're all welcome to be part of this universal deal." And um that it feels like that's a counter to your story because if if your story would were true, then shouldn't the West never have really occurred at all? like how did the West occur if this is such a genetically predetermined displacement tribal warfare deal? It seems at odds.

>> Um well, >> and maybe I'm misunderstanding. I might be understanding things. >> Don't don't doubt yourself. Your questions are are excellent and I see I see you grappling with it and it it's all good. Um couple things though. one, this is one of these places where you won't see it if you just focus on the human story because it seems so unlikely. But if you went and looked at all of the biological stories, um, you know, how do you get from, you know, a velocipator to a hummingbird? And, you know, if you look at a hummingbird, that's pretty counterintuitive, right? You want to take an animal, you know, that can't afford to store any fat and you want to

run it with this incredibly high metabolism where it basically, you know, is vulnerable to dying if it misses even a few meals.

It's like you would never think to design a hummingbird. But the point is actually from a starting point that you wouldn't have predicted it would end up with a hummingbird, you end up with this really remarkable thing. And I think this is the story of Christianity. But I would also just point out that the things that made Christianity so difficult at the beginning, much like the things that make Judaism difficult and still make it difficult, actually imbue those traditions with wisdom that they wouldn't have had if actually it was an easy path. So in some sense the answer to why it was so successful has a lot to do with the forge in which it was created. So and then I'll just put one last piece on. This is a hypothesis not yet uh demonstrated. But my hypothesis is that actually the reason one of the reasons that Christianity came to be as remarkably successful as it did become had to do with the match for uh its ethical predispositions and the time in history. So I mentioned earlier uh monogamy.

Monogamy it turns out is the best breeding system in human beings. If you want a population to expand. And the reason for that is because human babies are so unbearably expensive to raise. They take so much effort that the way to make a population grow at the maximum rate is to bring every adult into some part of the partnership of raising children. That allows you to produce children at the highest rate.

Other systems like polygyny, promiscuity leave males sidelined from contributing to child rearing because they don't have an incentive in the case of promiscuity and because one male is distributed over multiple reproductive females in polygyny. So those reduce the rate at which a population can grow. If your population isn't growing, that may not matter. But in the age of exploration, as you're discovering territory that your population comes to fill, partly through displacement in many of these cases, but if your population is in a position to rapidly expand, a monogamous population is in the best position to capitalize on those opportunities. So what you have is some moral predispositions that result in behavioral modifications that are an excellent match for the time period in history which results in the explosive growth. Right? And that does look a lot like an evolutionary story where you know you had to take an example you had a hippo or an ancestral hippo in the te sea which was shallow hunting and the more aquatic it became the more whalelike it became the more successful it was in that environment right it's you wouldn't predict the story in advance but looking back we can understand it in these terms Yeah, that's that is an interesting hypothesis.

it it um your your book uh the um huntergatherer's guide to the 21st century uh talks about monogamy I think in this way and it I found it very powerful just the the the simple fact of like of of uncertain paternity and how do you ensure as a male you can you know as men we can go around and get a bunch of women pregnant and if that's the cultural norm uh you what what's our incentive in that scenario? Our incentive is to deny paternity because um accepting paternity would invite a bunch of costs of care.

And since you know if in a world like that where there's just a bunch of guys going around getting getting multiple girls pregnant, if you can plausibly deny paternity, you get to get out of the cost. get all it's an all benefit no cost story, right? Is that one way? >> Bargain. >> Yeah, it's a bargain. >> You get you get playtime, the the the

the ladies get stuck with the kids and you'll probably get killed in some war anyway, so who cares? So, it's a really interesting um and powerful argument for monogamy. And it's just it's one of these one of these um it's one of the reasons I love that book. I think your book your book, you know, which you've expanded on obviously in this conversation and elsewhere, but it's still it's it's something I highly recommend for people because I think so much of what we're contending with sure looks like um that we are in a time right now where um we're just illsuited to the times. We're just we've sort of because we don't I mean we broke something right as cre as humans we we we and I don't mean break and I do mean break and I don't mean break. One of the things we broke was the was the sort of the the scarcity of the biological world. We're we're a creative being that invents things. It's not a zero- sum game in the human world the way it is. This dis the displacement theory doesn't need to be so because there's enough to go around because we create more stuff. I mean as we sit here there's about 8 billion people on the planet as I understand it about 4 billion live essentially like a modern western middle class life with running water that's clean and drinkable and automobiles and internet access and climate controlled housing. That's four times more people than the whole planet in 1880 living a life that no one in 1880 could dream of.

So that necessarily demands that that world's not a zero- sum game because where did we get all this stuff from? Mars, we created it. And it seems like um the Middle Eastern conflict is is a is perhaps is one of these things. But along a lot of dimensions, we are today somewhat like illsuited to navigate the world we've created for ourselves, including its comforts. I mean, we look at our kids and it's like, you know, in the past 10 years, we've seen this this rise of all these pathological behaviors that don't make any sense. If if Marx was right that the economic conditions are what determine our behavior, it's like, well, we're living pretty well. Why are why are young people facing so much psychological distress? That doesn't make any sense.

We should be doing great. And yet, like the the comfort has given rise to something. the the we're like a creature. Well, the way I like to think about it, I'm curious if you agree, and we maybe talked about this in our last conversation, too, but we're a creature that was built in a world of heat and friction and pain, illsuited to one without that maybe seeks to get back to it. You know, suicide rates go down during times of war. There's this stuff about what we are that's weird and that seems like because we aren't we aren't the kind of creature currently that can deal well with the world we're in now. Is that I mean how do you think about that?

>> Yes, we've created a world that we can't live in. Um and we've done that for a frustrating evolutionary reason. So if you think about the predicament of our ancestors, our ancestors almost never had enough resources like especially food. And the reason is because if you have too many resources, your population grows until you don't have enough. So populations tend to stabilize at some point at which point there is not enough. What that means is we become obsessed with ways in which things are wasteful, right?

Because finding more food is hard and saving some of what you've already found is equally valuable. So, we become obsessed with not uh taking extra steps. Our laziness motivates us weirdly. And the problem is there comes a point where you've solved the problems that are worth solving, but your obsession with problem solving continues to drive you to solve more problems. And you know, it's it's a case of be careful what you wish for, right? Let's take the example of sex.

The idea that sex is very rewarding and not plentiful enough causes ultimately, I would argue, the production of reliable birth control, ultimately chemical birth control, which makes a lot more common because the stakes are radically lowered. Did that produce a world of sexually satisfied creatures? No. Rather the opposite. It unhooked the logic of the system and did not create it sexual satisfaction at all. It created sexual dysfunction and dissatisfaction.

So I guess you know I was listening to uh Carl Sean's pale blue dot speech recently and one does have the sense that he saw our ridiculous predicament pretty clearly that here we are trapped on this you know speck of dust hanging in a sunbeam and unaware that if you realized if you could philosophically tap into how unlikely it is that we would be here and how good things actually are that you would realize, hey, let's figure out how not to get anybody to rock that boat so that we can persist on this speck of dust as long as possible, you know, as uh as willing to coexist as possible because having arrived here is a miracle in and of itself, right? to be obsessed with the fact that the the speck of dust we live on is imperfect is absurd. Um it's a marvelous place and we're wrecking it, solving all of the little problems of it, creating much bigger problems that we will later need to solve. That's an absurd way to behave in light of the remarkable opportunity that we have.

Well, I got to say in a um in a long and winding and deep and difficult and interesting conversation, I can't think of a better place for us to wrap up this time together. Brett, thanks for being on Dad Saves America. >> I've really enjoyed it.