

Tom Slater heretics 47 part 2

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Well, polling wise, I think it's pretty clear that the idea that there's anything like a majority or a high proportion of British Muslims who are in favour of this kind of terrorism, I think, is for the birds. There are kind of more nuanced problems. British Muslims are disproportionately more likely to hold or aggrieve certain anti-Semitic tropes, for instance.

My colleague, Rakib Ahsan, has done really interesting work on this, and he also points out that actually the better integrated those communities are, or certain British Muslim communities are, the less likely they are to believe in those anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. So that is a problem, and of course, we shouldn't shy away from it. But even so, we're not talking about a majority, we're not talking about an overwhelming majority.

So I guess it's a combination of not wanting to catastrophize about the threat, not wanting to isolate British Muslims, not wanting to caricature them, but at the same time to recognise that there is this problem, certainly with Islamist extremism, which needs to be confronted, and recognising that British Muslims can and will be allies in that, if you actually properly engage with them, which is what people seem intent on not doing. Yeah, that's a really interesting point, because we know from criminals, we know from all sorts of bad people, if you sort of welcome them in and you say, hey, let's talk, we're on your side, we want to help, they react much better than if you just go, you guys are all awful and terrible. I think Rakib was saying that he would change the way we do immigration and look at the actual towns and cities that we take people from, which in itself might be a problematic way of looking at immigration.

But he was saying, we're taking people from some of the places with some of the most extreme people. And it's one thing that I think is interesting in the midst of all this, is there is the question of, if you're talking about Islamist extremism, for instance, the question of migration, there's a question of asylum as well. There've been various sort of would-be asylum seekers who've gone on to commit terrorist attacks.

If you think about the Reading attack a few years ago, where three people were stabbed to death in a park. If you think about the Parsons Green bombing not too long ago. So this is a problem that needs to be addressed.

But I think one much more difficult conversation to have is the amount of people who were British born and bred, often in some cases, someone like Mohammed M. Wazid, who became Jihadi John, one of the ISIS Beatles, you know, sort of middle class suburban West London, in a pretty well integrated family, not an extremist family, as far as I remember, people might correct me on that. And yet, there's still something that is drawing them towards that. And yes, it's the propaganda of the Islamists and so on.

And we do live in an age in which international kind of Islamist terrorism was on the rise, and was chalking up some depressing victories. But I think there's also a question there, about what it is that we as a society are doing. And I think one of the big problem is in our discussions around Islamophobia, a lot of the narratives that challenges very well that come from particularly identitarian left that British society and Western society is a terrible place for Muslims, even though you're poor British Muslims, and most of them say it's a great place for Muslims.

That argument that the West is sort of rotten and Islamophobic and at war with them and so on. That sort of situation in which the message being propagandized by the Islamists and also the sort of identitarian establishment, chime. So I think there is there is something to be said about what it is that when we're talking about homegrown extremism, what is it that they're also picking up from our own society that is leading them down that path to a certain degree? Is it possible to be woke, you know, in with your mates, your student friends, and all the trans and this and that, and to also be very much against Islamism? Well, you don't find many of them, do you? I mean, that's the interesting thing is for whatever reason, I think it does, it points to a broader issue, which is the fact that we might have thought of, and we're talking about this in relation to antisemitism as well, you have thoroughly woke people who don't seem to understand antisemitism, often don't seem to care about antisemitism, sometimes engage in antisemitism.

And you think why that is, and I think it comes down to the simple point, which is that wokeness is not what it claims to be. Wokeness is basically presented to people or it's passed off as a new form of anti racism, a new form of social justice politics, although that phrase has been compromised for some time now, a new form of, again, kind of speaking up for the downtrodden and so on. It's clearly not, I mean, it's clearly just a new racial hierarchy, slightly different from the old one, although Jews still don't do very well in there, that has been ushered in.

And I think that's one thing that's become really obvious. And one thing that is so important that we refuse these people the moral high ground, because there is still this tendency to see left identity politics, wokeness, whatever you want to call it, as people who have their kind of hearts in the right place, but just taken a little bit too far, become a bit too intolerant, become a bit too zealous. That might be true of some people who have just sort of picked it up via osmosis, you know, sort of soft wokesters, as it were.

But in terms of the hardcore identitarians, I don't think those things apply. I think they're engaged in explicitly divisive, racialized form of politics. And it should be called out on those terms rather than seeing them as people who are on the side of the angels, but just get a little bit carried away, which is the way we often talk about.

That's always been the issue of learning about the left instead of the right, the

Bolsheviks and the Stasi. I mean, these were psychopaths, the leaders anyway, as much as anyone else. And then the banality of evil sort of carried the rest of the population that way.

Makes me wonder sometimes, I'm a bit of a nihilist. I don't know what you think of this, but are humans just a bit, not shit, but do we just, do we, I mean, we've grown up in tribes, right? Evolutionarily. It feels like we want to say to certain people, you're out, you know, and you look different from me, you're out.

And it's just that our society is the only thing sort of stopping us from doing that. But every now and then a society will lean in a certain way that makes it look morally righteous to do that. And that's what woke culture is doing now.

Well, it's a difficult one because, you know, you often hear people who are from a kind of evolutionary biologist or evolutionary psychologist, a lot of those people knocking around the anti-woke movement, as you might've noticed, who will make this kind of argument. On the one hand, I'm not really qualified to deal with it. It's not something I've studied necessarily.

On the other hand, it feels like a bit neat explanation for things where there is such a thing as politics. There is such a thing as ideology. There are such things as kind of intellectual and social currents, which can lead to a situation where people are being turned against one another in a way that might not have happened even in the relatively recent past.

But even if that was the case, that, you know, this is something which is, if we just take as given for a moment, it's kind of hardwired socially, biologically, whatever, it doesn't really help you respond to the questions of today at all. So I think the big part of the reason that we find ourselves in this mess on all kinds of different issues, the reason that we do have this new divisiveness in society, this new racialism in society, what I think is the kind of rehabilitation of racism, misogyny, even homophobia, but on woke terms that you often see take place is because of the fact that there have been intellectual currents, particularly on the left, which have got out of control, which have completely rejected universal values, enlightenment values, and which, and I think a big problem with the left as well is the fact that as it's drifted further and further away from what used to be its main constituency, i.e. the working class, the more barbaric it's become, the more it's kind of disappeared into the academy, into the media, kind of up its own fundament, the less it's had that civilizing influence of ordinary people. And as a consequence of that, it's now not only implacably opposed to the working class in many respects, but it's also taken on board some very questionable, to say the least, kind of ideas.

So I guess in a roundabout way, I think that there is still a big intellectual political battle to be had, and I think that whilst we can speculate about, you know, trends over

millennia, it might be better place to talk about what's happened over the past few decades that have ended up in a situation where to be anti-racist now means something that is the inversion of what it used to be. I like disappeared up its own fundament because it's very apt, but also sounds, yeah, pleasingly euphemistic. More polite than, you know.

But there's a euphemist sort of, you know, you've disappeared up your own fundament, mate. I like that. Yeah, really.

It sounds good. I'm going to start saying that to people. Mate, you have really disappeared up your own fundament recently.

I've really noticed it and everyone else has. What are some of those enlightenment values that people are losing track of? Well, I think this is one thing that's been happening, particularly to the left for a long time. And whilst I should say, I think the reason that we at Spites and people who are involved in kind of anti-woke commentary or whatever you might want to call it, focus on them so much is they do set the cultural agenda to such a large degree.

They are the kind of new clerisy that supposedly kind of woke, left-wing, identitarian, whatever you want to call them, values really do inform a lot of our political discussion. But so it's downstream from a lot of those intellectual trends. But I think what we basically had was a combination of things.

I mean, one thing that you've seen particularly in the wake of the Israel-Palestine conflict in October 7th is that a left-wing tradition of kind of anti-imperialism has just morphed and dissolved into anti-Westernism. That whereas a kind of previous generation would see great value in the notions of the enlightenment and want to take them even further than they had done previously. There is now this identitarian term, which is to say, these are just dead white European males that even if these values are good, they maybe don't really apply to everyone, which again is quite a racially questionable concept.

It's almost suggesting that these values are fine, human rights and liberty and respecting minorities and whatever, but it's just a white thing. It's a ridiculous position to stake out. But as I say, there's been this turn against enlightenment values under the veil of being kind of anti-imperialist or under the veil of being, again, more interested in other cultures or being multicultural.

There's of course the sort of turn away from freedom of speech, from the most fundamental liberties, which again were fundamental values to the left, not that long ago. Some great articulations of the importance of free speech came from leftist progressives, radicals of various different ilks. People used to see free speech, even relatively recently in the 60s and 70s, free speech is the great weapon against prejudice and intolerance and whatever.

You do not hear that today at all. That tendency is almost completely evaporated. And increasing democracy is the other one.

It's been really fascinating to see, particularly in the period after Brexit and the rise of populism, is that you had supposed left-wingers openly flirt with notions of the franchise, maybe being a bit of a mistake, that maybe it needs to be limited. Maybe the fact that basically just repeating all of the old slurs of the Victorian era that used to be made against working class people was that you can't really give them the vote because they'd just be hoodwinked by demagogues, or they'll just vote whatever way some rabble rouser tells them to, and therefore it's a bad idea. We're seeing this across the board.

It's hard to encapsulate in one sentence, but it's quite clear that things that used to be very central to a liberal enlightened democratic tradition, something that the left, as I said, used to see itself as the radical progression of that, it's now repudiated a lot of those values pretty explicitly. I suppose some of those are real concerns, aren't they? I mean, anything that we go for seems to be, politically, seems to be, at least I think, the best bad result, the least bad thing. And democracy, of course it has its issues because those are things that happen.

I mean, I used to live in South America. We've seen how people do just follow populist presidents and it can lead to terrible things, but maybe it's the best of a bad or the least bad thing we have. Well, I kind of think that I try and turn it on its head a little bit insofar as I think that democracy is so overwhelmingly a positive thing.

It's just very easy to forget that in the midst of election results that might not go the way people want them to, or there's this tendency nowadays to try and kind of second guess what the views of the electorate are, to ascribe motives to them that aren't actually true, to suggest that Brexit was purely because people just wanted to kick black and brown people out of the country. To the extent that Brexit was a discussion about migration, it was about largely white migration from the European Union, incidentally. So I think, in a sense, the question of democracy is a profound good, I think, and I think people should remake the case for it.

It's pretty obvious to me, particularly in the midst of the rise of all of the kind of horrendous things that are going on in society at the moment, that actually the bulwark, the kind of defence, the line of defence against the out-of-control identity politics, against some of the mad ideas that are taking hold in academia or in politics or whatever, is ordinary people. The elites have gone insane and ordinary people remain incredibly commonsensical. That's the kind of story of our time.

So I find it, particularly in the context of that, people to be more sniffy about democracy a little bit strange. Because if anything, I think bringing ordinary people much more to the centre of public life would do a lot to take the edges off an establishment which has gone mad in various different ways. You can see why they don't like democracy then.

Exactly, exactly. They want us to be as mad as they've gone. I certainly see, I mean, the Brexit thing, I mean, I was a Remainer and then it didn't go how I wanted it to go and I got on with my life.

As did most Remainers, I'm sure. It was only really that sort of layer who had a public profile or were particularly upset about it. I mean, there weren't an insignificant amount of people.

I mean, there were hundreds of thousands of people on those marches calling for a people's vote as if we didn't have one in 2016. But I think that was part of the problem, is that people would say, oh, you're just slurring all Remainers as if they're kind of liberal elitists who can't stand ordinary people. It's not that at all, but there was obviously a wing of it, a particularly influential one in the media and so on, who were explicitly, openly anti-democratic.

I thought it was so interesting in the wake of Brexit, where as soon as essentially an election didn't go the establishment's way for the first time in a very long time, the response was so visceral. It was so unvarnished. You had MPs saying this madness has got to stop.

The House of Lords have got to get involved. The courts have got to get involved. People, as I was saying, were kind of rearing anti-democratic caricatures, the sort of which you hadn't really heard since the Victorian era, about people just being idiots and sort of lumpen fools who were being led astray by Nigel Farage or any of these other people.

So I thought it was actually quite a clarifying moment as far as showing how distant the establishment had come from ordinary people, but also how disdainful of them at the same time. But as you say, it wasn't all Remainers who were acting like that. It was just the ones who happened to have platforms and places in the media and so on.

It's amazing their lack of self-awareness and lack of awareness, I suppose, or humility around their own luxury beliefs. Because I know that one of the reasons I wanted Britain to remain in the EU was I liked the idea of being able to live in lots of different European countries. I'd done so before.

I'd done my Erasmus student thing, which of course they could do another kind of thing like that where you get to study abroad, but I don't think they have yet and it's less likely. But those are the kinds of things that like, that's very me-centric. That's very specific to me and not to the whole country in the world or anything like that.

So I'd like to think I was able to have some humility and go, well, hey, I want that. I'd like us to stay because that's one of the big reasons, but that's not going to speak to the 99% of the population. So we move on.

No, I think that's exactly it. And I was quite amused often by the kinds of arguments that even the mainstream Remain campaign would come out with. So it would be, you cannot vote to leave the European Union because what about young people interrailing, you think? Is that really going to convince like a welder in Stoke to change his mind because he's worried that some Oxbridge student won't be able to have a nice time abroad.

And obviously it's all ridiculous anyway. People travelled in Europe before the European Union. It was never going to be impossible.

The other thing that always made me laugh and it would always come up was like, what about the roaming charges? Got cheaper roaming charges now, you know, you go abroad as well. And you would just think, are we really having a conversation about the line I used to trot out was like, you know, those who would trade their freedom for cheaper roaming charges deserve neither. It was ridiculous.

It was an absurd kind of proposition. But and also I think this is one thing that really came out in Brexit is people really failed to recognise the kind of class element of it. Working class people are much more likely to vote leave.

And therefore a lot of the arguments that Remain campaign were trotting out, whether it was some of the silly stuff or even some of the economic stuff didn't really work. A friend of mine who was reporting for a national newspaper around the time of the referendum tells a great anecdote of being somewhere, I can't remember exactly where, but kind of Redwall constituency. And he's out following around people door knocking with the Remain campaign.

And obviously they're trotting out the project fear, the economic arguments or whatever. And then at one point, some of the door turns around to him on a council estate, an area that hasn't done well over the course of the past 20, 30 years, shall we say, because what do you mean I could lose all of this? And it was a reminder that some people felt, you know what an economic hit maybe in the short term is, is a price worth paying if it means putting our interests back at the centre of politics. And I think many people voted for Brexit precisely on that democratic question.

It's certainly what you see if you look at the, when you actually poll and ask people while they voted for it. Yeah, there were nutters on both sides, there weren't there? Bendy bananas, passport colours. Bendy bananas, yeah.

But then again, you never really meet anyone. I think that's the problem is that sometimes we caricature one side of the argument on the basis of the most extreme exponents. So as we're talking about with the Remain campaign, not every Remainer is Alastair Campbell, obviously.

And at the same time, the Leave campaign, the idea that people were convinced or even

aware of these arguments about bendy bananas, and that's why they voted Leave is obviously for the birds. But it's an easy, it's easier to argue with a straw man as ever than it is with an actual bird. Sure.

Maybe most people are fairly moderate and sort of see both sides. It didn't feel like that with Brexit. It was the one time ever where it really felt like, but maybe most people go, oh, there's problems.

Do you think that it might be harder to teach the problems of left, like the bad side of left history at school? I just remember learning about Hitler and Nazis. I don't remember. I mean, obviously Stalin's name came up, but the Stasi was hardly ever mentioned.

Is that a little bit more difficult to get across to children that even though you think you're doing good, you might not be? I think it's a difficult one, isn't it? Because I almost want to turn that on its head and say, I sometimes feel like the people who claim to be on the left need to be educated about left-wing history. And I don't necessarily mean about the great leap forward and Maoism and the Stalinist terror or whatever. I mean, the movement that they claim they belong to used to be 180 degrees opposed to what it is that they're doing now.

This used to be a movement that certainly in its most positive iteration was really committed to democracy and freedom of speech and universal values that wanted to abolish not just racism, but the whole notion of race that wanted to really kind of carve out an entirely newer, freer society. And yet you've got people who every day are completely betraying that sort of legacy. So in a strange sort of way, I feel like people who claim to be on the left these days could do with being reminded of just how much they've kind of steered what used to be the positive movement down a very dark path in many respects.

They also seem to, I mean, a lot of lefty or woke people, they seem to hate England and they say, God, it's really gone. You know, England's a bit rubbish now. And when I say, well, where would you live then? They don't seem to, there's nothing.

And everyone just says Australia. And it's a funny one because Australia has got really strong immigration, whatever. It doesn't really let people in the way that we do.

And it sort of makes you think, well, and they name all these sort of very homogenous societies. Japan comes up, some of the Scandinavian countries come up and you sort of go, well, I don't know. Is some of this going back to Islamism, some of the things that the very people who want more Islamism to happen, is that what they're complaining about England for? I've sort of gone into circles here, do you know what I'm saying? Yeah, I think that people have a very strange relationship with not just England, but Western societies in general, where obviously they seem incapable of recognising the tremendous progress that has been made.

I mean, progress is a real dirty word these days, particularly on the left. And it's not to say that one should rest on your laurels as a society to kind of pat yourself on the back because of the fact that women now have the vote and that we don't openly, flagrantly discriminate against ethnic minorities and so on. But you do have to recognise it because I think the denial of progress, which happens particularly in kind of racial identity politics, particularly in America, but of course, we're sort of downstream from America on these issues, is a real problem.

Because if you refuse to accept that any progress has been made, how can you make any more? You've got to build on top of something. But also you find yourself having absurd, outdated arguments when you could be talking about what is actually existing in the here and now. But I think it's almost like it's, at this point, it's almost like people would rather engage in a certain shtick rather than actually deal with the issues at hand.

But I think England is an interesting one as well, because I think particularly post Brexit, there was a lot of this kind of self-loathing, national self-loathing on the part of certain section of society to sort of remain voting class, if you like. I think a lot of that was just repackaged class hatred, to be honest. I think they have this sort of vision of the sort of person who voted Leave, the sort of person who would have a cross of St George draped out of their window, the sort of person that they see is incredibly unsophisticated and that's why they voted Leave.

And incidentally, in my experience, often it's people who voted Brexit who know a lot more about the European Union than people who voted Remain. For no other reason than the Remain option was the status quo example. We know what this looks like.

But in terms of people who actually wanted to make that leap sort of into the unknown, as it were, tended to know a lot more about it and thought a lot more about it than your average. So I think a lot of that kind of discourse we had about England being this sort of backwater and Britain being this backwater was sort of a repackaged class hatred in many respects. It's amazing being able to repackage it in such a way that you can make it look like self-deprecation.

You can go abroad and talk to someone, you know, a German or a French person. Oh God, we're terrible and it's self-deprecating. Aren't we terrible, the English? And really what you're saying is, I hate the poor people in my country.

I was getting away with that. And I think class hatred, hatred of the working class, is something which connects so many of the trends that we're talking about. One thing I find so interesting is that the rise of sort of racial identity politics seems so bound up with fear and loathing of the working class.

So in the kind of, I remember there was a moment in the midst of the sort of Black Lives Matter protests in the UK. I think it was shortly after the statue in Bristol of the slave

trader whose name Colston was toppled. A couple of days later, a little art installation appeared and it was of basically a fat, bald English bloke wearing a string vest poking out of a wheelie bin.

And he was, I think he had St. George on his mobile phone. And I thought that was so interesting. So you had this moment of supposedly kind of anti-racist protest that was by someone kind of juxtaposed with this image, this sort of caricature of a sort of lump and proletariat idiot who they considered to be the villain of the piece.

And I think a lot of the sort of post Brexit moral panic that there was, this idea that all Brexit voters, particularly the working classes, were just really racist was an example of the fact that when people are talking about the country as being so infected by this poison of division and racism, whatever, the implied villain of the piece is working class people, which is ridiculous because of the fact that working class people often live in much more diverse communities. They often have intermarry. They often, again, they often mix with the people that these white, well-to-do activists claim to be speaking on behalf of to the extent that they certainly don't.

And yet there's, if you'd asked them to just draw who they meant when they thought of as some sort of vicious racist, it would look like that figure sticking out of that wheelie bin. It was really, they should do art installations of you and me. We're the villains of the piece.

Podcasters are the big villains apparently. Yeah. White male podcasters who are relatively trim.

So we don't fit that stereotype. But I definitely think there's an element of what you're saying because I see it in language or the way that language moves in these kinds of academic circles to catch out the working class. So that I really feel that obviously, you know, the word coloured, that was out of fashion for some time.

And it was almost as if they waited until literally the last person in England was finally aware of like, you're not supposed to say, there was still a few, some of the old football commentators would still say it. They get caught out from time to time and that'd be a big scandal. Really what was happening was no one was going, that guy must be a racist because they knew that these football commentators, they often had friends who are from all sorts of mixed cultures and different kinds of ethnicities.

So they weren't really being accused of being racist. They were being accused of being ignorant and stupid and not knowing the latest call or the most modern words. And we finally got to a point where I think literally all 70 million people in the country knew you weren't supposed to say coloured.

The next day they changed it to people of colour. Like it's to catch, I really feel it's to

catch out people who are not at university. Well, exactly.

I mean, it's one of those things which, especially because the fact that like, I might be wrong about this, but as far as I can tell, people of colour was a phrase that had been knocking around America for quite a long time. But it was something that really wasn't said in the UK. In parallel, you see this attempt in the UK to kind of cook up terms that have never been used before.

There's, you know, BME or BAME. These are words that literally no one has used ever to describe themselves, their own community, ethnic minorities in Britain in general. And yet it is interesting how the role language plays in all of this, because even though it's not necessarily a sort of plot, it is through knowing the right things to say, knowing the right opinions to air, knowing when you're supposed to use this word and not this word, knowing that it's wrong to ask people where they're from now to do this and to do that, through which status is kind of conveyed, you know, in the way it used to be sort of received pronunciation and clip tones.

It's now offering up your pronouns when you meet someone. It is clear that that kind of linguistic game is quite important to how these people maintain a certain status these days. – Back to the evolutionary tribal stuff that you don't want to focus on.

It always goes back to that, but absolutely. I mean, how can there be an elite if there is not a much larger group of people who don't know the ins and outs and the codes and the social norms? And that's what cults do. That's what sects do.

That's what authoritarian governments do. It's like the people at the top know the right words to say, and it only filters very slowly down to the ignorant masses, by which time they're changing the codes at the top. Where can people follow you and your work? – So the first place they should go to is Spiked, the magazine that I edit, spiked-online.com, at Spiked Online, all one word on Twitter and most of the social medias.

Me personally, I'm at Tom, Slater underscore on Twitter, slash X as well. – Please go and follow Tom. I've got one more question.

Who is a heretic you admire? – You did pre-warn me about this. And it's a tricky one, isn't it? Because you don't want to sound too worthy. You want to try and be original.

– You don't want to say Christopher Hitchens. – You don't want to say Christopher Hitchens. – How many times did Christopher Hitchens pop into your head? Because I think everyone's so far saying Christopher Hitchens.

– Oh, really? That's interesting. He's not one I'd go for automatically. But one who is a heretic I admire, but also I think informs a lot of the work we do at Spiked, I'd say Thomas Paine, a great 18th century writer, one of the founding fathers of America, effectively born in England, but obviously goes over to America just as the American

Revolution is kicking off and becomes the person who basically articulates the case for it.

And also just the impact that he had. I mean, Common Sense, his famous pamphlet in 1776, it's read by, I forget the exact statistics, but a huge proportion of the then population of America, it was actually read loud in taverns to people. But I think he's a fascinating character.

I mean, he's a heretic in the literal sense because he upset a lot of people, even on his own side, because of some of the arguments he would make about organised religion, but also a heretic as far as making some very daring cases, not only supporting the American Revolution, getting involved in the French Revolution, being chased out of Britain and having his works suppressed because they were seen as obviously diametrically opposed to the interests of the regime, but also very willing to upset and castigate and get into fierce arguments with people on his own side, which I think is quite a useful reflex to have, definitely. That's a great heretic, Thomas Paine. People go and look up Thomas Paine, go and follow Tom Slater on the Twitter and the Spike stuff, and we'll put the descriptions in the links, no, the links in the descriptions, and keep watching this channel.

We're going to do a quick Locals thing as well. Go to andrewgold.locals.com, that'll also be in the description, and you can see the next few questions that you guys asked.

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