

Noel Lateef: In this the Foreign Policy Association's centennial year we're very fortunate to have with us this evening a distinguished leader of higher education. President Leon Botstein will speak to the important topic of elites, higher education and the future.

You may have seen in the current issue of the New Yorker a review of a book published by the Foreign Policy Association 50 years ago. A 1968 book tried to predict the world of 2018. The book successfully predicted pocket computers and the jacket cover asked the question, "Will our children in 2018 still be wrestling with racial problems, economic depressions and other Vietnams?"

I am pleased that president Botstein's remarks this evening will be included in a new book that we are publishing this year, that will predict the world of 2068. I should note that president Botstein chaired a blue ribbon commission that looked into the relevance of the mission of the Foreign Policy Association 25 years ago.

It was underwritten by the Ford foundation, and as I recall the leadership of the FP at the time waited with some trepidation for the conclusion of this important report. We are grateful to president Botstein for concluding that our mission was never more important.

Ladies and gentlemen, to formally introduce president Botstein I'm going to turn to an FPA fellow of long standing, who happens to be the dean of international studies at Bard college, and director of the Bard globalization and international studies program, Jim Ketterer. Jim?

Jim Ketterer: Good evening. It's a pleasure to see so many Bard alumni, faculty and students here this evening, who come not only from our campus in Annandale, but as Noel mentioned, the Bard globalization international affairs program here in New York city that draws in students, not only from the Bard institutions, but from colleges and universities across the country, and in fact across the world, and many of them are here. Thank you for attending.

As Noel mentioned, like many people at Bard I wear several hats. In addition to being a fellow here at the Foreign Policy Association and my work at Bard, I'm also on the board of the World Affairs Council of the Hudson Valley. We spend a lot of time and a lot of effort in that organization holding meetings and setting up events around the great decisions program, and using the many other resources of the Foreign Policy Association. In those various capacities Bard, Foreign Policy Association, the World Affairs Council, I feel like there's a lot of overlap in the activities, and in certainly the mission of these organizations.

It certainly could be said of president Botstein that he needs no introduction. Never the less I'll give him one. I think by way of introduction, you know that he's the president of Bard college, that he is the musical director and the principal conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra.

Though that combination certainly is something that's embodied at Bard, but I think what maybe is not so obvious and is becoming more obvious over time about Bard as an institution, and about the work that president Botstein has been carrying out for quite a long time at the institution is that Bard college, while it is a campus in the Hudson Valley, and is focused on the education of undergraduates and some specialized graduate programs, that Bard also is a global institution. That Bard has not only students who come to Annandale from around the world, but students who study and receive Bard degrees at various other institutions around the world. In Russia, in the Palestinian west bank, in Kyrgyzstan, in Berlin, and a special relationship with the central European university in Budapest.

But it's not just global, it's also here in the United States, with high school, early colleges here in the city of New York, in Manhattan and in Queens, in Newark, in Cleveland, in Baltimore, in New Orleans, a new high school, early college in China, in Western Massachusets. That this is an institution that takes seriously its commitment, not only to the liberal arts, but to bringing together these various components, domestic and international, and making it work.

President Botstein is a relentless defender of free speech and an ardent advocate of liberal arts. There was a great article about liberal arts and Bard as kind of a missionary institution. I think that's one of his many, many signature achievements. With all that having been said I turn over the floor to president Botstein.

Leon Botstein: I hate to see someone standing so, especially someone who is a friend, so there are actually seats, but that would make it hard for you to sneak out early. But I really, I don't, if there's some way we can get seats for everyone, so that no one is really ... It'll keep the remarks short, it's all right. I want to thank Noel Lateef and Jim Ketterer also for the kind introduction.

What I would like to talk about since most of you have come out on a cold night to hear this talk, which I wouldn't have done if I were in your shoes, I would have stayed at home. I want to take seriously the idea of thinking about, I wasn't aware of the book of the future. We like to think short term, so we think about 2018, we think about 2020, and I would rather sort of think about 2026, which would be, if my math is right, the 250th anniversary of the Republic. It's in between, I won't be around for the tri-centennial, most of us in the room were at the bi-centennial.

But 250 years is a reasonable number, and the question is, what will American democracy look like, what will America look like in 2026, which is not that far off, but far enough off that it is within reach of a reasonable prediction. The more you go out the more fanciful the predictions become.

I want to say by, before I get going, that I have three apologies to make. One is that I'm not an international relations expert and I'm just a citizen with unvarnished opinions that I try to defend as best I can by reading and research. I'm not a political scientist and I'm not a prophet. I have no claims to prophecy since I am unsure that there is a metaphysical presence, which we call the divine. I have no particular access to privileged information from those of you who believe in the

existence of God. I want to apologize for that.

I want to apologize for repeating things that you may already know, that are obvious, but it's hard to say something true and worthwhile and new at the same time. That is to say, the press for novelty can lead us astray. In so far as I reinforce things you already know or believe, I can do very little about it.

In these kinds of talks I do want to say ahead of time that I may offend some people here, we have a very low threshold of tolerance, of difference of opinions, and we rarely go to talks to hear something we don't believe. We like the talk if it confirms our prejudice and we're annoyed if it actually confronts those prejudices. I may annoy you, but there are some of you I will never see again, so there is no particular harm. Our paths won't cross and so you won't have to put up with me, and I'm not running for office, so I don't need your vote. I apologize for the candor ahead of time, no offense is meant, just perhaps disagreement.

Let me start from a very basic premise. The basic premise is that when we think about democracy this seems so obvious, and that includes also what kind of educational system would exist in a democracy, we're thinking at the core constituent of the way we talk about democracy is the individual. This may be an obvious point, but it's not so obvious. What I mean by an individual is not an individual as a representative of a group, not a person who presents him or herself as a protagonist for a very essentialist definition, whether either by gender, sexual preference, religion or race. That the idea of individuality, which is inscribed actually in the biology of the species is uniqueness. That every individual is in fact unique. It's actually more unique even than the old forensic fingerprint, which can be manipulated, is actual in the DNA sequence in the genome. Modern biology has defended the idea of uniqueness. Democratic theory, which we live in our rule of law, holds the individual to be the unique and the core constituent of democratic theory.

Now, there are two traditions of how democratic theory works. Let me start with the one that is familiar to us, upon which the American constitution is largely based. That has the following mythology, and the mythology is, it's a kind of faux-anthropology. Once upon a time there were very few people, there was just Adam and Eve, and it was kind of a wilderness. I think the theorists thought of the wilderness not being quite so cold, since nobody would have survived, but more in a temperate climate. There was something that they posited, called 'the state nature'. The state of nature [inaudible 00:13:16] a few people and they procreated and there were more and more people, and because there was so people and the ratio between people and the world was favorable to the people, there was no need for any regulation or government. [inaudible 00:13:30] speculations about whether or not they had language or did not have language, and they had no naming system, they were not divided into tribes and families, they were just running around feeding and sort of learning their way through life.

As the 18th century, the 17th century theorists believed these original human beings were not imprinted, the most influential of these theorists is John Locke,

were not imprinted by any primary knowledge. They were neither good or bad, they had a mechanism, an instrument. It was a kind of proto-mechanistic notion, the way we think of a computer, they had an operating system, that operating system we called was reason. The way the operating system got content was by a pain and pleasure experiential issue. Baby knew no better, put hand on fire, it hurt, never did it again, and began to make associations. That's the associations theory of knowledge.

Very important that every political system is dependent on a theory of human epistemology, how one learns, how human beings function. What was radical about this idea is it had detached human beings from a prior moral claim, as in the Christian reading particularly of Genesis three of the fall of man. Man was not bad, or Hobbes for example, and was not good either, but a kind of neutral figure who learned as man went, humans went, and over time.

Then this deteriorated, and this deteriorated into a state of war, because people then ... The ratio between people and the world became unfavorable and human reason, invention, farming, hunting, meant organization was necessary. So everybody got organized and the taller organizers held down the smaller organizers, there were no [grooms 00:15:41], no boundaries and so people began to quarrel and bloodshed. There was the state of nature deteriorating into a state of war. This mythology is very important.

Then finally [inaudible 00:15:54] had language, and then everybody involved mythically got together and said, "This can't go on. We're all going to kill each other, so let's set up some rules and figure out these rules, the rules of engagement." That became the theory of the social compact, the social contract.

People said down, these mythical, our mythical ancestors sat down and said, "Our self interest leads us to believe this is not possible, so we'll have to have rules, and the rules require sacrifice, generalized sacrifice on all of our parts. We're going to give up our natural freedoms, our natural rights, except," in the American formulation for three, "and we'll take out civil right." Everybody throws in her or his natural rights and comes out with civil rights.

Now, I have to admit when they thought of this in the 17th century women weren't quite in the equation as equal partners, we understand that, and crucially for the United States, neither were people of color, the descendants of slaves. Which is a problem which has not left us.

In this basic idea it's a very interesting formulation. In the American Declaration of Independence, the authors said the famous line, there were three inalienable rights, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Those are something you couldn't cash in, which theoretically, the irony of course is, the uncashability of life raised the question how they tolerate slavery. Obvious question. Liberty, the same question, and the pursuit of happiness, which was a moral claim. In the 18th century language the pursuit of happiness was a reciprocal theory of wellbeing. In other words, happiness meant wellbeing which was beyond the individual, but was

the individual in the way that was not necessarily competitive with the whole.

Now, these people got together a long time ago and so what is relevant to us? These theorists invented something called tacit consent, which is: all of us were born of parents, and we were born in a place, and we grew up with the benefits of that place, and we were construed as tacitly consenting to the rules of the game. That became the rule of law, a deliberative system of self-government, where everybody understood things like due process. Everything we hold dear in a democracy became part of the claim.

At the end of the day, the object of this protection was the individual. Not as a member of the group, because this system, interestingly, worked very well for groups that might be different, that didn't know one another, complete strangers. It's interesting that America has succeeded as an immigrant nation, where people come into this calculus with different languages, different heritages, different religions. Again, taking the issue of color, the recalcitrant problem in America life, setting it to the side. That's the, I would call that the American tradition.

There is a continental tradition, the same story with a twist, and that the most famous exponent is Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the French version of it. This is a little different. They're on the same page with the state of nature, they're on the same page with the deterioration of state of war, except there's a different point of view. From their different point of view the human being is born a social animal, not an individual. There's a community from the beginning. That community, event in the deceration of rights of man, the French revolution is about a reordering of a pre-existing community.

The fact is there is an implied homogeneity and coherence of language, customs and place. What happened in the French revolution is it got distorted, because the main issue for the French revolution was issue of inequality and feudalism, the owning of people, and the liberation. Equalizing among and within a community.

The fact is that individuality was held in suspicion. The real object of the political reform was the wellbeing of the entire community. There's language about the general will and the will of all, that what's good for the entire community, the necessity that all these natural rights that we talk about are a myth actually.

They take their philosophical origin from Aristotle, and it's no surprise that the continental theory of the social contract, how we got to a democratic system of government appealed also to Marx and to socialist theorists. Because there again the issue was not the individual but the community was the constituent concern of politics and government. But America remained steadfast in this idea of the individual.

Now, there were two very important problems in the United States. One was the question of race. This is a problem which wasn't totally solved at all by the emancipation, nor by the amendments to the constitution. The way they got out of this argument is to declare people of color not human. It worked very logically, so

long as you declared people of color to be not human. That's not plausible and the whole idea of race is actually a scientific myth, and a corrosive one.

Then of course the question of immigration, which is the nation being, people being brought in. I won't even speak of the question of the willful and inadvertent extermination of the aboriginal population. But what's great about it is that in theory the democratic principles that we adhere to in the American system are susceptible to the integration of tremendous difference, of pluralistic difference, and that the adjustment doesn't require a fundamental rethinking of the theory. A communitarian theory of politics is actually more problematic, as we see in Europe today.

The issue in the United States, let's say about immigration, or about race, is not really principled, it's completely pragmatic. It's the question of somebody thinking that immigrants take jobs away. But what's happening in the United States and what concerns me is that because, that's why I chose 2026, we're getting old. As when we were a young nation we didn't have this discussion of a communitarian homogeneity, which of course doesn't exist, but we're not beginning to talk in ways that remind us more of the European.

The problem in Europe, in a place like Germany, or Austria, or Hungary, or France, is a fear of the loss of a French way of life. Perfectly understandable, Christian, multi-generational communities with a long history and mythology of their coherence are now seeing people on the street that don't look the way they do, don't speak the way they do, don't dress the way they do, and seem a threat to the survival and the future of their familiar community. A perfectly human understanding, but it also needs to be understood that their conception of what is the nation and the relation of the nation is not based on individuality, but their membership in a preexisting group.

That is a kind of language, linguistic and physical coherence which has made Europe notoriously intolerant to minorities. The last major minority of Europe was exterminated and that's the Jewish minority, despite extensive assimilation. So any muslim in Europe says, "Why should I assimilate? What's my future?" They actually if they thought about it historically, they're on very solid grounds, because actually the more the foreign body assimilated, the more dangerous they were viewed, the more they passed an integrated, the more corrosive the argument of impurity of a preexisting community became.

We're now reaching a kind of middle age as a nation and we're beginning to think that the America that we have is a community, and which we have to preserve over perhaps the rights of the individual. This is, I would argue, a very bad idea. Its popularity is in fact in the United States not obvious, but you can see signs of it.

In my view there is, we are only in the beginning of a long history in front of us, of enormous migration. For economic reasons and political reasons, there will be a flow of population. Partly because of climate change and development of populations that Europe, which is experiencing a secular decline of native

populations, will inevitably be the destination point of people moving from south to north, and the United States will as well, and Canada, will be increasingly the objects of migration.

The only way in my view to deal with this is to return to a theory and a practice of democracy, which focuses on the individual. The two question therefore that with the original theory of democracy has to find a way to reconcile, as number of one the question of race, to get clear that people who look different and have different physiognomy are equal and are entitled to the same privileges and rights as those people who look in the mirror and see the others as different. And two, that all this talk about social contract and a social compact and a rule of laws cannot survive without a measure of a reduction of radical inequality.

What are the fundamental problems we face in trying to preserve a democracy which is based on individuals and on freedom? The first is that we have not encouraged ourselves to think of ourselves with a real pride in difference and individuality. Most of the discussion now has to do with our affiliation with groups. If you see the discourse in American politics, it's not only a matter of identity politics, it's a matter that people see themselves as representative of things where they acquire the self-definition. They don't develop their own independence and autonomy of thinking.

We actually don't like people who think differently. We don't like people act differently. We want, and this is a little bit of the heritage of the American puritan heritage, people who go to American public schools and think that the pilgrims, so called, came here to create a free and diverse society are mistaken. They came here to create a society which was completely uniform and rigidly controlled on religious doctrine. If you didn't like it you moved from Massachusetts to Connecticut, because the theology was different. The idea that we're this secular democracy is a myth and we still carry our puritan heritage, which is to put the centers into those things you see in those recreated villages, where they are publicly humiliated.

Now, it's very important to remember that the religious heritage in democracy is crucial because the other way in which democratic theory holds water with us as a culture is religious, and that the credit goes primarily to Martin Luther, and before him to Augustine. That is the idea that there is the justification by faith alone, that it's not my membership in the community of faithful, but it is my conversation with God that allows me access to salvation and grace. And that is the individual who prays before god, who actually has access to, and not through a mediator or through an institution or through an organic community.

That radical individualism inside of protestant theology is crucial to our democratic heritage. But the fact is that we are a conformist culture and we have an enormous ambivalence to people who confront us with different habits, different behaviors, that's number one.

The second is that we are cowardly in resisting group condemnation. This is

particularly now the case with social media. That is to say if you actually have a contrary opinion you will encounter an enormous virtual barrage of stoning, the way you would stone someone who you didn't agree with. The vitriol on the internet, if you ever write anything that angers somebody, it's not that you'll get a polite letter saying, "You know, I think you're wrong," but actually there is anger, and collective anger, and organized collective anger in these networks of response.

We don't live in the physical community of debate, we don't have a generation that is coming of age with the experience of debating and compromising. We don't actually have an experience of saying, "I agree, you disagree," and we actually then find out why we might disagree or agree, and we might agree to disagree or we might agree to compromise, but it's in physical time and space. The public space of the conduct of democracy has been displaced to a virtual space, and that virtual space doesn't have the same character. You don't look someone in the eye, you don't actually share the need to, even in verbal communication, to sort of adjust.

As I've observed many times to my colleagues, that email and written communication, texting, is a terrible thing because it's ineradicable, which means we have no capacity to forget, and forgetting is crucial to a civilized life. If you cannot forget and you cannot forgive, you cannot have a civilized life. You've offended me, now I'm willing to forget it, but then I see it again. I can't erase it and I'm reminded as if the first day of how offensive you were. My ability actually to say, "Well, I didn't mean it. Well it is not exactly what I said. You misheard me." No, it's right there, black and white. There is something corrosive about the way we conduct our own affairs. We do then now take cover in group allegiance. It's a strange circumstance, we used to have petitions in all political developments, but now the sort of signing on to a set ideology, identifying yourself by a label or by a cause or an opinion.

The other, very significant for me, problem is that we also love the tyranny we impose on ourselves. The problem for America in the loss of freedom and democracy is not an outside threat. It's not a threat that used to be in the Cold War of someone attacking us. It's not about North Korea or about China or about Putin. It's nothing about being conquered. We don't have to be conquered, that's the great miracle of the Russian intervention in the American election. How easy it is to manipulate us. And actually how much we like the idea that no one will put up with thinking differently. Dissenting, thinking differently, doing things differently, except in the marketplace where people are rewarded for certain kinds of innovations, is actually enjoyable.

Many of you may have seen, and I do recommend it, it's strange that we make money on tragedy, but there was a miniseries made on the Unabomber, which appeared on Netflix. It's one of these biopics. Now, I've always wondered why we as a public reward the commercialization and aesthetization of grotesque violence, but since I didn't do it I felt free to watch it. I thought, "Okay, I can watch this."

What was striking, really striking, the people who made this obviously were very clever, is if you look at the Unabomber's manifesto, the thing that he wanted the

America public to pay attention to is shockingly prescient. You look on the street, people mesmerized by technological devices, their entire life controlled. Walking down the street talking to no one, looking not around them, waiting incessantly in minutes for a constant conversation that is completely vacuous, that our parents and grandparents survived happily without, where are you?

When any filled moment mesmerized by a device, completely dependent, totally willing to sacrifice any notion of privacy to the control. Forget Big Brother, I'm not worried about Big Brother, I'm worried about Big Amazon, Big Apple, Big Google, they're much more dangerous than anybody we could elect. The control and the manipulation. In fact they can find you. What is human life without secrets?

Civility required not only forgetting and forgiveness, but secrecy and mystery. You can be found, every one of you, any time during the day and night, and then be exposed. The public is only interested in the exposure of personal deviance. If you look at the newspapers and the news media, the balance between political reporting, and the reporting of economics and politics and ideas, and the reporting of the personal lives of famous people is an imbalance that is not plausible. We have tolerated the politicization of personal life, and of sexuality, as a surrogate for real discussions of how communities should be governed. That acceptability has created a field of entertainment.

The most dangerous about the president of the United States today is not anything other than his ability successfully to prove the absence of interest of the American public in ideas and politics, and the focus on personality. He has successfully shown, he has dominated the news media for every single day with utter genius, with no consistency, no responsibility, and we the public are completely happy with it and entertained. It reminds us of our own powerlessness, for which we suddenly feel, "Okay, we're just victims of something we had no control over." The situation is relatively grim for the future of this idealized democracy that the Americans invented in the 18th century. Even if we successfully included immigrants and people of color, which we need to do.

Coming to a close, what's to be done about it? In my view one of the most important things to do is to really rethink what we mean by educating the future generation. We need to educate the future generation in a way we're not doing now and I think we need to focus on only three things. To simplify what we do and how we do it, already from elementary school through secondary and higher education.

First of all, we cannot bring up a nation of scientific illiterates. This has nothing to do with STEM and engineering, it has to do with the ability, the one last bastion, where there is a distinction between truth and fiction, between a reasonable opinion and an unreasonable opinion, is in the area of science. Everybody thinks objectivity is the source of truth until they wheel you into the emergency room. Then suddenly, when they wheel you into the emergency room there's an objective preponderance of evidence on how you should be treated. Nobody asks whether the operation you're taking is a Christian white operation or an Islamic colored

operation. There is the belief that we share a common destiny in terms of our physical and medical character.

Scientific literacy is a crucial ability for a generation to figure out when they're being told the truth and not. On the internet this is a very significant thing, because that which is untrue is more easily camouflaged with the dress of truthfulness. Footnotes, false evidence ... The only way to pierce that is to have more knowledge than the average person and to have sufficient knowledge which goes beyond what is on Wikipedia.

The second is real historical literacy. People say that the issue is civics, how a bill becomes a law, which too few Americans understand. But that has to be taught within a historical context, to understand how one can think about the development of cultures, civilizations and practices. The kind of competing explanations, we now like the narrative, the competing narratives about our history and what our history means, which we see in the discussion over monuments or about what the legacy is, are ones that require people to be able to negotiate a question of what was our past. For people to say that the civil war for example was simply the sign of the failure to compromise are people who think they've read history, but have not found a way to remember what that history really was about. There can be competing explanations. Some are compatible, some are incompatible.

The third, which I have a special vested interest in, is what is the secular way we can remind people of the sanctity of every human life? In my view that's aesthetic literacy. That is the way in which we construe beauty through our own experience, and we create that which is uniquely human. What we do as humans, which we animals do not do, it's not a matter of a cognitive or moral rights or ethical rights, is the kind of thing that exists in what we would call poetry and in the visual arts and in music. Those are the inventions that have no utility and are completely the product of the life of the imagination. Every individual is capable of participating in that, and that both as participant and as creator. That sense of aesthetics, which also applies to sports and the conduct of sports, and the beauty in sports and in many aspects of life, but the aesthetic dimension.

We need to actually arm our young people against thinking that ignorance is tolerable. To the question of elites, the anger against elites, which includes anger against universities, which was evident in the first versions of the tax bill and barely got written out of, is some sense that we in the university, privileged people, have neglected, which we have, a large portion of the population. That knowing something isn't necessary and doesn't make us superior, kind of radical 'know nothing' egalitarianism, which has survived in the nation, that needs to be translated into a defense against a fear of being left out. We need to find a way for people to be embarrassed about ignorance and willing to correct it.

With modern technology there are many opportunities for adult education, for reeducation, something which the liberals never paid attention to, a condition that we have now and the anger of the so-called neglected white populations, are the

work of the liberal democrats and not of the conservatives. They're the work of the Clintonites and the people who stood in the middle and embraced globalization of economy without any regard to the consequences to people who were left behind.

We need to find a way to make education, the way it is for many immigrants, the instrument of self-betterment, and make it real and not false. We need to find a way to control the power of technology. We need to gain control over the machines, not the machines over us. We need to try to educate virtues of living together in public spaces, in ways that technology makes harder. And we need to walk away from a fascination with the prurient and the personal.

Finally, a person who is, we need to recreate a tolerance for privacy and a respect for that. A distinction between the public and the private, which permits a better group of people to enter public life. One of the problems we face is a decline in the quality of people who are willing to go into political life, and I don't blame them. Nobody I would want to have to run my town, my city, my country, is not a person who is not morally compromised. I have a horror of a perfect person.

The idea that human would be ruled by people who are better because they've never looked askance, they've never been tempted, they've never strayed, someone without a skeleton in her or his closet is not to be trusted. If in fact one is going to be pilloried for errors of one's youth or even in adulthood, recognition that we've made mistakes makes us better rulers. I want to be judged when I go to trial by a person who is interested in forgiveness and rehabilitation. [inaudible 00:46:17] we've learned, actually the institution I run is the largest prison education program in the country. We have lived and seen the ability of education and of limited punishment to change people's way of life. Tolerance and forgiveness and a belief in redemption and rehabilitation is terribly important.

In order to do that we have to not be interested, not know that in our 24 news cycle will make more money the more allegations we can provide about impropriety of people who are famous. We need also to create a real regard for excellence. Not all elites are bad. We seem to have no problem with elites in sports, no problem. We pay them well, we honor them, now and sometimes we exploit them beyond what human frailty would allow, as in the case of Tiger Woods and so. But in reality, we need to respect elites in other areas, where in fact we are not made angry by seeing people who can do things we can't. What the egalitarianism we now live with is, has a very thinly disguised vein of anger and jealous and envy. That's why we like to hear the people who are at the top fall, because we're angry that they broke the norm. We are comfortable with the norm of mediocrity and egalitarian mediocrity. That's not tolerable, we should celebrate the excellence of our fellow human being.

If we're going to get to 2026 with a democracy intact, we need to think very carefully of how we educate and we need to talk, have a national conversation, which is not the usual conversation. Which is not a conversation about privatization, not a conversation about public versus private education. I've always said that there are moments where democracy is not the best system, so if I were

the dictator of New York, I would abolish all private schools. If we abolish all private schools the public school system would improve dramatically as the people with resources and influence would not tolerate the conditions to which we provided access to education for those who don't have the ability to exit the public system. I can say this freely, since we run two public high schools in the city of New York, which are excellent, which are on the public system, but they are not charter schools, but they deliver, I would arguably, among the best high school educations in the country.

It's possible to do this, but that has to be a national will to do so and we need to, in our education, redeem a theory and a practice of democracy which focus on the individual, extends those rights through race and religion and to an immigrant population that is not Norwegian. That permits us to actually be as we have been for many generations, the beacon of the rest of the world. I'm not a Wilsonian in foreign policy, but I do believe that the way American democracy was constructed, by which citizenship, and I see many people in this room, is not something you were born with necessarily, but can be earned, and that that citizenship renders you equal.

That it is not a matter of homogeneity and race and religion and place, that the miracle of the American democracy based on the individual, and not on a pre-existing myth of the community, is something that needs to be generated beyond our borders. That can only happen if we are successful as a nation, and we need actually to reverse some of the more destructive and corrosive aspects of our culture and politics that have consumed us in the last 20, 25 years. Thank you.

Noel Lateef: [crosstalk 00:51:11]

Leon Botstein: Sure, sure.

Noel Lateef: President Botstein, thank you for those very incisive, insightful remarks. I think you are prophetic in what you are saying here, so we'll see how this holds up in our centennial publication. I'm going to let you call on your questioners. If you would just keep your questions brief and introduce yourself, thank you.

Leon Botstein: My colleague Michael Ignatieff, who is the rector of Central European University has a great phrase. He said when he opens the floor to questions, he said, "Remember, a question is a ... It's a short sentence that ends in an interrogative." But please, [inaudible 00:51:59] also. Yes?

Audience: [inaudible 00:52:02] who said that it doesn't matter whether the cat is black or what, that it matters whether it catches mice. [inaudible 00:52:09] history and [crosstalk 00:52:14] as to whether we're-

Leon Botstein: Yeah, I get it, start again [inaudible 00:52:18] yeah.

Audience: I'm sorry, the question is more whether our system is better at catching mice than other systems, and that you can see if you look back that when Russia was being

relatively successful people were turning to communism and that kind of thing, and then it fell apart and everybody abandoned that. Now the essential issue of whether democracy continues here, would it not be more sensible to say as to whether people see China as a more successful model than the U.S. or vice versa?

Leon Botstein: If I understood this correctly ... As I understand the democratic system has as part of its essential component the right to property. It's success has to do with the freedom of the individual to pursue life economically in such a way that he or she has a sense of progress, ownership and a protection, it's competitive, it's a competitive system, as opposed to a communist or social system.

I think one of the barriers for us is that it's not, I don't think it's possible to sustain a system purely on the calculation of utilitarian material self-interest. There has to be some non-economic, non-material value that motivates people. Now there is such a reductive quality to the definition of the results of freedom being material, that there is the quality of life question, especially if you believe like some people do, that robots and that mechanization will continue to make certain kinds of work irrelevant, then the question becomes, what's the purpose of life?

I have a much easier time defending my homeland or my wife or my husband or my family if I have the sense of satisfaction that I had to chop the wood and bring home the food as a hunter or gatherer, and I actually defended my life and I spent my life doing something that was worthwhile. That's not needed anymore, I'm not needed for my manual labor, this all can be done by artificial intelligence. Therefore what am I going to do with my time?

That's dangerous to democracy because if you're not needed where is your sense of value? If you're needed only in way that's demeaning, your anger against the people who can find a way. I'd love not to work because I, for one reason or another, am able to entertain myself, whether it's in music or reading or whatnot, I can fill my so-called leisure time up. The ability to do that, not all people are cognitively equal or have equal set of talents, and the sense of wellbeing is something a democracy has to find that people could attach to.

The trouble is that as a democracy deteriorates the attachments we sell are competitive. Hate, fear, the amount of misinformation that travels in the United States about who's responsible for what, and the amount of demonization of other types, is enormous. It's only through education that you can actually get around thinking of the world in a kind of uncritical stereotypes. I'm not sure whether that answers the question. Yeah?

Audience: Okay, [inaudible 00:56:25] your question mark I've been trying to rephrase a couple of things and question mark first. I think that ten, 50 years ago [inaudible 00:56:37] war on poverty [inaudible 00:56:39] a lot of the money went to give academics money to study poverty and now we talk about STEM research, it's not that I'm against [inaudible 00:56:48], but I think it's a [inaudible 00:56:51] research. I'm asking to a lot of these are in fact motivated by the greed of the people who are raising the issues. I'm not saying they're inconsequential, and I [inaudible 00:57:03]

stand.

Leon Botstein: You're suggesting that the concern for poverty is motivated by a desire to discuss the issue?

Audience: Yeah.

Leon Botstein: Yeah, the question that I wonder is, so let's assume we could eliminate poverty by some sort of subsidy, when negative income tax or some kind of minimum subsidy of all individuals. Since I don't believe poverty is self-inflicted, I don't hold the position that Scrooge had in Dickens that the poor were responsible for their own fate.

The question is, let's assume we're able to eliminate poverty, which we should be able to do, and that progress and technology and the production of food and so forth, even in a controlled environment should make that possible. It doesn't solve the question of, especially with increased longevity, of how you give all the people in society some sense of ownership and allegiance to the rule of law and a civilized place. What do they derive from it? That's the pursuit of happiness question, which is a collective question, not an individual question.

That's deeply problematic and that in the absence of sufficient compelling work for a large mass of population the kind of fear of the tyranny of the masses, the question of tyranny is not from top down but from bottom up, because there is a kind of a fundamental dissatisfaction. Who likes to be thought of as useless? Of making no contribution, of having nothing to do? One of the insights about battling poverty I think is that one has to find a way to do that where people emerge from it with a sense of self-worth.

Yeah? Wherever the microphone can go quickest.

Audience: I'll try without one, you may be able to hear me.

Leon Botstein: Go ahead. Then give the gentleman with the beard and out there, yeah.

Audience: Pericles said that freedom is the sure possession of those who have the courage to defend it. My question to you, as you've talked about the French concept of democracy, I'm a Brit, so we're sort of somewhere between, and the American, is that there appears to be, through cybersecurity breaches and social networks, a movement to erode freedom and individual freedom. I would like your view on what Pericles and others have said about the need to actually be robust in standing up to defend the freedom before we lose that freedom.

Leon Botstein: The Periclean, as you know the great translation of the Peloponnesian War were written by Crawley in the tone of a parliamentary speech. It was very 'britishized', if you will, in a very attractive way. The one thing I could say, a footnote on the Periclean vision is that we have to find a way to reconcile the Periclean with a non-aristocratic notion of democracy. We have to be honest of the 18th century

founders of the nation, whether they took look to Rome or to Athens as their models, were aristocrats. The only people at the social contract table were people with property, so we without property had no claims, let alone slaves and so forth.

Can we do this? Can we make freedom real by extending it to the entire population? The thing about the current circumstance is what I fear, is a transformation of the way we use language. The best example is friendship. Friendship is a real virtue, it's a very important virtue in a civilized society. It's not family, so family you can't get rid off, you can make believe that they don't exist, but you're going to be someone's ambulance service simply by family relations, which you can't avoid. But friendship is voluntary, friendship you acquire and you keep and you nurture. It's a civilized and very important category.

Now what Facebook has done is trivialize friendship. That's not friendship. The same way that liking something on Twitter is not liking. You can only like something you know and Twitter has insufficient information to be likable or unlikable. We have corrupted the language and we've created a virtual fake of human relations, and the ease with which we'd delude ourselves.

I would say that to defend freedom requires more of a sense of the benefits and the difficulties of freedom. You know, the most Americans have no idea what the Bill of Rights are, they don't know what their freedoms are, couldn't tell you, and they don't mind it. Their life as consumers and sort of having this vacuus conversation with others in the name of friendship, it is sufficient. They're perfectly happy, and in fact, if you remind them of what they might be capable of doing, they're angry because you're essentially criticizing them. Then if you're criticizing them, they have an anger of your presumed superiority.

It's the same thing, one of the great things about sports and the physical activity that many Americans now enjoy, is it can't be done vicariously or virtually. In other words, much as I, there was once a woman who won the Boston marathon by taking the subway, that was discovered later on. I admired her ingenuity, so I would have, I'm in favor of kind of minor league corruption which shows great ability to get around the rules.

In point of fact, the exercise, being fit, I used to be, I've changed my mind of it, I used to think when you drove down even Manhattan where were those exercise people. These were people, really it's unpleasant, banging away at these machines, sweating profusely, exhausting their physical capacity, going nowhere.

It wasn't they were running to tell the Athenians that the Persians had been defeated, there was no purpose to run 27 or 26 [inaudible 01:05:03]. I mean it's completely irrational. I thought, if they only exercised their minds with the same intensity we'd have a civilized society, because everybody can learn. Instead of having these machines which are physical, sit the people down and do a mental, and that would be a truly civilized society.

I've given up on that. Now I realize that the people on the machines, actually it's

not bad, because it's one of the few things they can't do vicariously. They can't just Twitter their physical fitness. They have to actually sweat and they have a sense of satisfaction of it, so it's not too bad.

We have to cultivate for the defense of freedom, somehow a sense that they're the beneficiaries. The people are angry who love autocracy, the strong man, are the people who feel they're not benefiting. Then of course they, and when you say, "Well, you're not benefiting by the autocratic either," but at least they're not promising something and pulling the wool over my eyes, they're honest.

Slavery actually, voluntary slavery, not involuntary slavery, is unfortunately a human condition that people actually like. People are very comfortable saying, "I have no responsibility." The taking on of responsibility for one's behavior is the hardest thing to teach. The idea that I'm a victim. I learned a very important lesson growing up as descendants of victims, and the lesson I learned is, you're not morally superior because you are from a family of victims. You have to ask the question, "What would you do were you not the victim but in the family of the victimizers?" In other words, "What is your opportunity to act properly in the world?"

But if I can say, "I'm unfree, everything is closed off to me," then I'm relieved of my obligation. Part of the problem in the United States in my view is the watered down nature of religious belief, that the evangelical churches, the fundamentalist churches have trivialized the struggle for meaning that is inherent in serious protestant theology, which is the certainty of one's own salvation, the notion that it's not good works but the sensibility you have about your actions in the world that lead you to grace or to salvation. That's a tough road, and it's been made sort of just like Twitter and Facebook, the same language has been stripped of the challenge. The people who love autocracy actually think that it gets them off the hook.

The defense of freedom is very, very hard. I don't think we really embrace the center, much as we'd like to think otherwise, we too often resent the people who do exercise their freedom. Yeah?

Audience: [crosstalk 01:08:44]

Leon Botstein: Oh, the poor guy, let's take him and then we'll go right to you. Yeah, go ahead.

Audience: I wanted to ask you about this conflict with elitism. I am from a working class family, but I found myself at the end of high school going to Bard. Now post-Bard, post other degrees and being a so-called expert I don't find conflict when I go to my working class town as much as the initial conflict I found when I was saying, "I can go and [inaudible 01:09:11] Bard." As a high school student the people around me were like, "Why are you doing that? Why don't you go to the local state college." My dad's a plumber, "Why don't you become a plumber?" These kinds of things.

I've always felt that the biggest barrier in my life with regard to elitism was the idea

of being anything better than what you were at when you were very young, what you grew in. How do we fix that problem? How do we fix whole communities where they don't allow people to really feel that they can leave and do more?

Leon Botstein:

[inaudible 01:09:43] very good question and I think the two best answers in intellectual tradition, both have their roots both in religion and philosophy. Number one, this is a hard one, especially if you run a university or college, that just because you're more educated doesn't make you better. The truth is most people with a PhD and education secretly think they are better because they have an education. This is patently false and we should be aware of that. If there's one important lesson from the 20th century, particularly European history, is that the worst barbarism in our recorded history was not done by ignorant people, but by well educated people.

The hierarchy both in Soviet, in Stalinist Russia, and the hierarchy in Nazi Germany were educate people, not uneducated people. That Lenin and Stalin were educated or not, illiterate barbarians, and the apparatus in the Nazi circumstance was populated by largely very well educated people.

Getting an education and knowing technical language doesn't make you ethically or morally better, that's number one. It's very hard, you see it in the university, if you go on the campus of any great American university, you'll discover faculty members talking down to clerical people. They have a hierarchy of superiority that's based on status and education.

The second thing is to realize that doing whatever you do well is something to respect. I actually respect someone who is a good plumber, which is not easy to do. That not to look down on any kind of enterprise as being subordinate. Now, this is hard in this country. Actually it's not, it's could be easier in this country, because actually the financial rewards that we provide are not commensurate to the skill involved.

People make a lot of money sometimes for reasons that are not obvious, investment banking being one of them, and the same with lawyering. Whereas somebody who is actually very good at a certain kind of skill, we don't reward teachers in the same, financial rewards are hard to distribute. I think the way around your question is to really come to terms with a genuine egalitarianism about the quality of work that people do and the service they provide.

One of the great professions that unfortunately doesn't have sufficient status in the country is nursing. This is a fantastically important profession. The way we've organized medical care is also perverse in the sense that we have devalued the contact with the patient and the human aspect of it.

It seems to me that ... The other thing of course is that in your high school, or in even my high school, it was a public high school, try to talk the other person out of an illusion. For example, where you go to college makes no difference in what you become. The first thing I tell any parent of an applicant is, "Don't worry, you can get

a great education in most institutions." There are only a few I would prevent my children from going to, but the others, you can do this by, having to go to Harvard, Yale, or Amherst is a ridiculous thing. It's the same idea that the shirt I wear because I paid five times [inaudible 01:14:24] much with Bergdorf is actually inferior to the shirt I bought somewhere in the Bronx that has no label. That happens not to be true.

Even in my field, you know I learned an early lesson in high school, I went to a public high school, which was a music high school here in New York. The violinist Isaac Stern showed up unannounced. We were in a rehearsal of Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante and the guy who was playing the solo violin, wonderful guy, I was a sophomore, he was a senior ... He walked into rehearsal and we played on school violins, these were cardboard pieces of junk that basically were taped together with scotch tape.

There was a break and [Charlie Rap 01:15:23] said to him, "Mr. Stern," said, "I'm terribly sorry if I had known we were coming we'd have brought our own instruments," you know, turning to all of us. He said, "Oh, don't worry, it sounds great." Finally, we kept rehearsing and then we sort of called on Stern to play. He was there you know, it's a piece he knew, why don't he step in? Sure enough, Stern takes this piece of junk, right? I remember sitting there and I learned a lesson which I've never forgotten. "Don't complain about the equipment." He starts to play and it sounds like a million dollars.

The point is, to convince the other person not to be envious of what they think is a head start on your part. I think it is a real problem. There is something about reason, there are theorists of human nature who believe that humans are inherently bad because we behave so poorly. We take pleasure in being superior to somebody else.

Because I was the youngest and I had very tough-minded elder siblings, I had a lifelong affection for the underdog. That's an important thing to realize, is not to get joy from outwitting somebody, outsmarting somebody. I've always had an aversion to a kind of competitive sensibility. I used to play tennis, but no one ever wanted to play with me because I admired if the other person hit a good shot. Why run after it, it's just so great, you know? I didn't mind losing. I was happy to lose, in fact I stopped playing when I began to play with academics, who didn't play very well, but they were determined to win, they would even cheat. I said, "I can't do this."

We need to rid ourselves of being happy at someone else's misfortune. It's very human, it's very human. There are a lot of people whom I wish bad things would happen to because I have a source of resentment, but then I have to stop myself. I say, "Wait a minute."

I was impressed in my high school reunion, which actually I hosted, public high school reunion, that the sort of [inaudible 01:18:07] we had in high school at that age, you can grow out of it. Actually you can grow out of it. I was impressed by the

generosity of spirit and the sense of wellbeing that many of my classmates, who entered civil service, teaching, perfectly ordinary professions, some retail, none of them became rich and famous, and got real enjoyment. That's where friendship, intimacy, a sense of community that's not virtual.

In the end of the day, people talk about teaching and how technology will change teaching, and there'll be kind of virtual classroom, we won't have a class, we don't need bricks and mortars, we can get a university education for cheap. I'm guilty of saying the same thing over and over again, that technology is terrific and very important, and we absorb technology in education. We do it now, the internet and databases and communication, online learning, all that's great, but it only improves education at the margins. That education is comparable to sex, technology helps, but only at the margins. The basic transaction has remained the same.

That is true of satisfaction in life. Friendship remains the same, whether in the 17th century, whether depicted on the stage by Verdi in Don Carlos, or whether in the 21st century, technology helps. Marriage and its difficulties are the same whether you have a handheld device or not. It's a little harder to hide adultery, so in the great opera of Saint-Saëns Catherine de Medici burns the letters that she got showing Anne Boleyn's treachery against Henry for solidarity with Anne Boleyn. This is not historical, it's all made up, but it's a great ending scene because she's able to put the letters into a fire. Try that with the iCloud. You'll never be able to do that.

The human experience of being human, the cherishing, every time I see someone who is sick, or someone who is dying, the cherishing of the beauty of life, but the capacity to realize that beauty is what the best protection. The difference between those of us with an education and those without is that I can transform, I can transform my sense of the every day. I can see things because I've been taught to see them, that if we could teach other people to see them ... the prisoners are the best advertisement. They've learned to appreciate literature and music and mathematics and the life of the mind. They understand the freedom is in their head.

But it's a hell of a way to discover what life is about, to be incarcerated. My fear is that those of us with freedom to do as we wish have devalued the nature of freedom. But the experience you have about envy is, who you think you're better than, there's a very good answer to that, which is to say I know I'm not better, it's just what I can do.

Noel Lateef: President Botstein, you-

Leon Botstein: Thank you.

Noel Lateef: ... have given us a lot to think about. Thank you for gracing the FPA forum.