

## Audio file

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## Transcript

00:00:06 Speaker 1

Hello and welcome to the COG podcast.

00:00:09 Speaker 1

Our podcast brought to you by the quality of Government institute at the University of Gothenburg, where we have conversations with well known experts to try to make sense of politics and governments all over the world.

00:00:21 Speaker 1

Hosting this show is Professor Victor La Puente in today's episode we have Professor and best seller author James Robinson, who will talk about some of the big questions in social sciences, why some nations fail and others succeed.

00:00:36 Speaker 1

What is the secret of economic and democratic prosperity?

00:00:39 Speaker 1

Thanks to the encyclopedic knowledge.

00:00:41 Speaker 1

James Robinson, we will be traveling through different time periods and geographics searching for the Holy Grail of progress.

00:00:49 Speaker 1

I don't want to give away any spoilers, but the message of hope for humankind that Robinson gives us in this podcast about the balance between power of civil society and of government is both simple and congratulating very old and very fresh.

00:01:04 Speaker 1

We hope you enjoy it.

00:01:08 Speaker 2

It's a great pleasure to have in our podcast, James Robinson, professor at the Harris School of Public Policy of the University of Chicago and director of the Pearson Institute of the Study Resolution of Global Conflicts.

00:01:18 Speaker 2

He's one of the most influential social scientists of our time. Just as curiosity, he has over 95,000 Google Scholar citations.

00:01:26 Speaker 2

With very original and pioneering works on the importance of institutions for long term economic development, but his impact goes beyond the certainly narrow ivory tower of the academia.

00:01:39 Speaker 2

And together with Darren Acemoglu, James is the author of the 2012 Bestseller *Why Nations Fail*, where they popularized the simple.

00:01:48 Speaker 2

And powerful idea that the progress of nations depends on having inclusive institutions and not extractive ones.

00:01:55 Speaker 2

And in 2020, they were back with another grand book, *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies and the Fate of Liberty*.

00:02:03 Speaker 2

And I agree with several observers like Martin Wolff that this book, *The Narrow Corridor*, is more original and exciting, if any, than its predecessor.

00:02:14 Speaker 2

I think it's.

00:02:15 Speaker 2

Impossible to find a wider book than *The Narrow Corridor*, and it covers the fate of liberty or the lack of from the Bronze Age until the current crisis of democracy.

00:02:26 Speaker 2

The book deals with the fundamental paradox of politics of who shall guard the Guardian, who is *custodiet Ipsos custodes*, or as it is stated in *The Federalist Papers*, in framing a government which is to be administered by men over men.

00:02:41 Speaker 2

The great difficulty lies in this you must first enable the government to control the governed.

00:02:47 Speaker 2

And in the next place oblige it to control itself.

00:02:51 Speaker 2

And then, unlike many other scholars, and maybe unlike your own previous work, James, you argue that who needs to control government is not another public institution, the judiciary, a system of separation of powers, but the society and.

00:03:07 Speaker 2

Welcome to our podcast, James and the first question is about this precisely about the proper role of the society and of government.

00:03:15 Speaker 2

The balance between them for the prosperity foundation.

00:03:19 Speaker 2

So what is the narrow corridor?

00:03:22 Speaker 3

Yeah, it's the place where.

00:03:24 Speaker 3

The state and society have balanced in some sense.

00:03:27 Speaker 3

I mean, I think what we tried to do in that book is sort of say you can classify polities in some sense in terms of the balance between the state and the society, you know, in some places it's very clear that the state dominates the society.

00:03:43 Speaker 3

Like China, for example, or Russia and in some cases it's very clear that it's the other way round. Those are places that are much less studied by social scientists, but nevertheless, they're there, Yemen be a great example. Be a great instance. And many places in sub-Saharan Africa, where I've worked.

00:04:00 Speaker 3

The society is more powerful than the state, and it's interesting that it's in the middle somehow.

00:04:05 Speaker 3

So the book is about how actually this balance it gets neither of those two types of societies do very well.

00:04:12 Speaker 3

China doesn't do very well.

00:04:14 Speaker 3

Yemen doesn't do very well.

00:04:16 Speaker 3

They have different strengths and weaknesses, but it's in the middle where society and state is balanced that somehow.

00:04:22 Speaker 3

You get a very synergetic type of relationship between States and society, and it's that which create.

00:04:28 Speaker 3

A place like Sweden or Britain or the United States.

00:04:31 Speaker 3

It's actually that balance between the people and the mobilization and the participation of the people and the state.

00:04:38 Speaker 3

Your quote from The Federalist Papers was very opposite because that's that's sort of exactly what it's about.

00:04:44 Speaker 3

But unlike James Madison, we don't think that this can be achieved.

00:04:48 Speaker 3

Through constitutional design, it's not an engineering problem.

00:04:52 Speaker 3

It's a kind of political problem.

00:04:53 Speaker 3

Society has to.

00:04:54 Speaker 3

Be mobilized and stay mobilized.

00:04:57 Speaker 3

You know, here's a very contemporary example if you.

00:04:59 Speaker 3

Look at what happened in Sudan.

00:05:01 Speaker 3

Why was there a transition in Sudan away from Bashir's dictatorship? Because society got mobilized, society got organized, and it protested.

00:05:09 Speaker 3

And and how has the military been able to come back because society couldn't sustain that mobilization because they decided the governor government of technocrats was going to be the right solution for the transition?

00:05:21 Speaker 3

And society dissipated.

00:05:24 Speaker 3

And so the military can come back.

00:05:26 Speaker 3

There's an example of how you have to have this balance going if you want to create an inclusive society.

00:05:32 Speaker 2

These days, actually.

00:05:33 Speaker 2

We are seeing a narrow corridor in Ukraine disappearing through the advance of the Russian tanks and also in Russia.

00:05:41 Speaker 2

We saw the emergence of a terribly effective despotic state after the collapse of the Soviet Union, built around this despot Putin, a former.

00:05:52 Speaker 2

AGB agent.

00:05:53 Speaker 2

You describe it very well in the book, actually.

00:05:56 Speaker 2

Fantastically well.

00:05:58 Speaker 2

And then you claim that the society in Russia maybe was not strong enough to counterbalance that racing power.

00:06:05 Speaker 2

Of putting unlike, for example, what happened in Poland, where the opposition to the Soviet Union was more bottom up were more based on social mobilization.

00:06:17 Speaker 2

So I think that's a very good point, but I would like to ask you, what about the international factors that also play may play a role now in Ukraine?

00:06:26 Speaker 2

What about the role?

00:06:27 Speaker 2

For example, the European Union?

00:06:29 Speaker 2

If we see the development of GDP of Ukraine and Poland was pretty similar at the fall of the Berlin Wall, but then a few years afterwards was tripled in?

00:06:40 Speaker 2

The case.

00:06:40 Speaker 2

Of Poland and it was because it was closer to the West.

00:06:44 Speaker 2

It was the influence of the European Union, the agreements and eventually the entry of the European Union.

00:06:48 Speaker 2

So in some way, with the international factors are a bit absent in your explanation for prosperity of nation, mostly based on domestic factors.

00:06:58 Speaker 2

The power of the state and the society.

00:07:00 Speaker 2

So which is the role of international factors?

00:07:03 Speaker 2

Don't you think that international factors play a role and eventually could play a role in UK?

00:07:09 Speaker 3

I mean, I think I think you're right.

00:07:10 Speaker 3

That's exactly what we we make this argument in the book about that Russia, the Russian transition was there was never a mass participation by civil society in Poland.

00:07:18 Speaker 3

You had solidarity.

00:07:20 Speaker 3

You know, you had this enormous upsurge that toppled the Communist regime, so.

00:07:24 Speaker 3

So that's a very different.

00:07:26 Speaker 3

Initial condition in some sense, but obviously the.

00:07:29 Speaker 3

European Union played a very important role in making institutions more inclusive, all over former Soviet Union countries in Eastern Europe.

00:07:38 Speaker 3

I mean, I think book is not about why Russia invaded Poland.

00:07:43 Speaker 3

I think that Poland was on the same track as as, as Eastern Europe. There'd been this orange revolution and, you know, there was a real kind of overthrow of this crony oligarch LED government, which had been there after 1990.

00:07:58 Speaker 3

And that's why Putin has done this now, because now there's a government which is not corrupt, which is really popular.

00:08:04 Speaker 3

Which can't be controlled in the way he wants to.

00:08:06 Speaker 3

He can't turn it into a satellite state, and so that's somehow deeply threatening to the way he runs Russia.

00:08:13 Speaker 3

So it that's a sort of set of mechanisms.

00:08:15 Speaker 3

Which is a bit outside the scope of.

00:08:17 Speaker 3

The book, I would say.

00:08:19 Speaker 3

International politics in our world matters at some key moments.

00:08:24 Speaker 3

We spent a lot of time talking and doing research on colonialism and the impact of colonialism.

00:08:28 Speaker 3

So here this is, I guess, what's Russia doing?

00:08:31 Speaker 3

Is a type of colonialism in some sense, the whole of Central Asia was colonized by most of Central Asia, was colonized by Russia in the 19th century.

00:08:40 Speaker 3

During the Soviet period, so I don't know if we could think about this in terms of the either way, we think of the impact of colonialism on institutions you.

00:08:47 Speaker 3

Know colonial powers.

00:08:48 Speaker 3

Like my own country, Britain created extractive institutions all over the world and in some.

00:08:54 Speaker 3

Contingent circumstances like in North America, relatively inclusive institutions emerged or in Australasia, but that's an example of kind of international politics in some sense influencing institutions.

00:09:07 Speaker 3

But I guess that.

00:09:08 Speaker 3

Whenever I've studied the history of a particular society or particular part of the world, have always.

00:09:15 Speaker 3

Kind of overcome by the sense that it's the sort of domestic political dynamics that are the most important that and that's true whether you look at Latin America, you know, I've been studying working in Colombia for almost 30 years or in West Africa.

00:09:29 Speaker 3

You know, it's remarkable the extent of persistence of African political culture and African.

00:09:36 Speaker 3

Institution and so, so I I'm just trying to explain the way the why I think like I do because whenever I got into one case in detail.

00:09:45 Speaker 3

And learned about the history and the society.

00:09:47 Speaker 3

It was always these internal factors that dominated things.

00:09:51 Speaker 3

But that's not to say the world doesn't repeat itself.

00:09:53 Speaker 3

The European Union is a kind of fantastic innovation and we need a lot more like that, and so far the only thing good which is coming out of this whole invasion is the European Union may recover a sense of its.

00:10:05 Speaker 3

Mission and identity and that would be fabulous.

00:10:09 Speaker 2

It seems that that could be the case.



00:10:12 Speaker 2

Another original idea of of your book is this what you call the Red Queen effect in honor of the?

00:10:18 Speaker 2

Character of Lewis.

00:10:18 Speaker 2

Carroll Alice in Wonderland and it refers to the fact that you have to keep on running just to maintain your position.

00:10:25 Speaker 2

In this case, the ones who need to be running are the state and and the society.

00:10:29 Speaker 2

But can you explain us a little bit what you mean by that and how that could apply for exactly for what you were mentioning now cases like the European Union or or many Western countries where we have?

00:10:42 Speaker 2

Many people could claim oversized states with, I mean, even in the US, that there is not a huge welfare state there.

00:10:49 Speaker 2

There is a debt of \$30 trillion so so how can the society keep up with those states?

00:10:56 Speaker 3

So I think that has to be.

00:10:57 Speaker 3

It's the institutionalization of that which is which is key.

00:11:00 Speaker 3

I think if you go back to this, the image I had of this balance between the state and society, you know, and I I said when you get this balance.

00:11:10 Speaker 3

There's a sort of synergetic relationship appears, and that's what we call the Red Queen effect, and the idea is that the state is trying to control.

00:11:18 Speaker 3

Society and govern society, but society is trying to control the state too and make sure it works in its interest in the collective interest.

00:11:26 Speaker 3

So that's a kind of game.

00:11:28 Speaker 3

And in that game state and society both.

00:11:31 Speaker 3

Get stronger.

00:11:32 Speaker 3

They develop capacity, they organize and it's that which kind of creates modern, inclusive societies.

00:11:39 Speaker 3

When you topple over one way or the other, then you don't get that competition.

00:11:43 Speaker 3

And so China dominates the society.

00:11:47 Speaker 3

Obviously, that makes it very difficult for society to do anything but the insight.

00:11:51 Speaker 3

Here is that.

00:11:53 Speaker 3

That keeps the state weak as well because the state doesn't have to compete to control society.

00:11:58 Speaker 3

It's very easy to control society, so that actually has important consequences for the nature of the Chinese or the Russian state, for example.

00:12:05 Speaker 3

So that's the sort of the subtle aspect of it.

00:12:07 Speaker 3

I think.

00:12:08 Speaker 3

You know, you're asking a great question and all the things we tried to talk about in the book.

00:12:11 Speaker 3

When we look at kind of longer run.

00:12:13 Speaker 3

History is how.

00:12:14 Speaker 3

How this competition sort of institutionalizes itself?

00:12:18 Speaker 3

Over time that you need to kind of create institutions to sustain this mobilization, sustain social organization, find mechanisms of accountability, kind of force the state to reveal information, force the state to concede rights and authority.

00:12:35 Speaker 3

And so.

00:12:36 Speaker 3

So I think that's.

00:12:37 Speaker 3

That's the key thing.

00:12:38 Speaker 3

If you look historically, it's the institutionalization of the way.

00:12:42 Speaker 3

It's very imperfect, that control, but it needs to be institutionalized.

00:12:45 Speaker 3

And, you know, sometimes modern mass democracy is a particular institutionalization of that conflict.

00:12:50 Speaker 3

But we trace the roots of that, and they're much more historic than the emergence of mass democracy.

00:12:56 Speaker 2

I think one of the great contributions of your book that runs counter a lot of the things that are established, at least in political science, is this idea of the balance of power between the state of society because many.

00:13:08 Speaker 2

People would claim exactly the opposite, that we need a time for the stay, a time for a society.

00:13:13 Speaker 2

There should be a sequence we need a past of a despotic.

00:13:17 Speaker 2

Vietnam as a prerequisite for prosperity and democracy afterwards, and you contradict that view.

00:13:23 Speaker 2

For example, you're talking your book about how Prussia.

00:13:25 Speaker 2

In the 18th century followed a despotic path and became what Hugh Elliott defined as a vast prison in the center of which appears the great keeper in the in the care of his captives.

00:13:38 Speaker 2

Sure, but many people, and at least in political science, would argue, but wasn't the merit based.

00:13:46 Speaker 2

Bureaucracy that emerged in Prussia there.

00:13:49 Speaker 2

Precisely as a result of this, military efforts with entry exams to join the army and eventually later the civil service, a kind of institutional prerequisite or institutional foundation that later on facilitated both economic development and and democracy, and something similar many people.

00:14:09 Speaker 2

Would argue of Developmentalist dictatorship in the second-half of the 20th century, both in East Asia or South.

00:14:16 Speaker 2

In Europe, so that is maybe we need a despotic state, we don't need a narrow corridor.

00:14:22 Speaker 2

We don't need a balance.

00:14:23 Speaker 2

We need a despotic state first.

00:14:25 Speaker 2

Once we have a despotic state.

00:14:26 Speaker 2

Afterwards, we can have the luxury of democracy or something like that.

00:14:31 Speaker 3

Yeah, I don't think that's true at all.

00:14:33 Speaker 3

Many political, I mean, Samuel Huntington, I suppose.

00:14:36 Speaker 3

You know, that's kind of what Huntington thought.

00:14:37 Speaker 3

And many people thought that you have to create a state and then modernization creates democracy or something afterwards, you know.

00:14:44 Speaker 3

But I think that's nonsense.

00:14:45 Speaker 3

Like the data doesn't support modernization theory.

00:14:48 Speaker 3

And I think if you look at successful societies, that's actually not how they create.

00:14:52 Speaker 3

Did that's actually not how they created institutions.

00:14:55 Speaker 3

Does that help Russia?

00:14:56 Speaker 3

You know, in the 19th century, the Romanos created a kind of police state, the osana, which?

00:15:01 Speaker 3

Which which kept.

00:15:02 Speaker 3

Everybody under control, which was then a model for lenins police state and is now a model for Putin's.

00:15:07 Speaker 3

Police state. So where's?

00:15:09 Speaker 3

The development or the modernization there?

00:15:11 Speaker 3

That's the sort of classic.

00:15:12 Speaker 3

Despotic Leviathan, and it's very persistent.

00:15:15 Speaker 3

I think the Prussian case is sort of interesting.

00:15:18 Speaker 3

But I think the.

00:15:19 Speaker 3

The the extent of bureaucratization of the Russian state is wildly overemphasized.

00:15:24 Speaker 3

If you read Hans Rosenberg book about that, the Russian state was actually full of aristocrats and elites right the way up till the Nazi state.

00:15:31 Speaker 3

It was full of.

00:15:32 Speaker 3

The von Hardenberg's and the Steins and the. So there were big elements of patrimonialism.

00:15:37 Speaker 3

In the Prussian state.

00:15:38 Speaker 3

Right, right up until it's demise.

00:15:40 Speaker 3

And I would say it's the yeah.

00:15:42 Speaker 3

Germany starts doing better in the 19th century, but that's the collapse of serfdom after the Battle of Yenna.

00:15:48 Speaker 3

It's the kind.

00:15:48 Speaker 3

Of these sort.

00:15:49 Speaker 3

Of reforms. That's it's the 1848 revolutions that brings kind of more mass suffrage and more so from my perspective, what's the difference between Russia and?

00:15:59 Speaker 3

And Russia, well, Russia was very.

00:16:01 Speaker 3

Far from the the corridor in 1800, let's say, and Russia was much closer to it.

00:16:07 Speaker 3

The Enlightenment came to to Prussia and and it didn't come to Russia.

00:16:10 Speaker 3

And maybe that explains a lot about.

00:16:13 Speaker 3

Russians attitude Putin's attitudes towards people's rights and the legitimacy of people's participation in government and pressure was a weird mix of a kind of a place that was outside the Holy Roman Empire and the place that was inside the Holy Roman Empire. Brandenburg, which actually had all sorts of Institute historic institution of representation and checks and balances.

00:16:34 Speaker 3

And those bounced back after 1806, so and this is too many details, but I would.

00:16:38 Speaker 3

Say the story of Prussia, actually.

00:16:41 Speaker 3

Is when that that absolute estate kind of Withers away after 1806 and you get all these other institutional dynamics that actually the place becomes.

00:16:50 Speaker 3

Much more successful and the bit that becomes successful, of course, is the bit in the West rather than E rather than the East, which was a more intensely feudal and despotic.

00:17:01 Speaker 2

Let's continue precisely with this point of the of the Roman Empire, which I think is another original thesis on on.

00:17:08 Speaker 2

Your book you.

00:17:08 Speaker 2

Have a.

00:17:09 Speaker 2

Original hypothesis on on the rise of Europe.

00:17:12 Speaker 2

I think few things have been more studied on why capitalism and eventually the industrial revolution took place in this particular corner of of the world, which is Western Europe.

00:17:20 Speaker 2

Quite unlikely.

00:17:22 Speaker 2

Will take into account that other parts of the world could be in principle, in a.

00:17:26 Speaker 2

Relatively good position and particularly China, according to Karl Marx, the three key inventions for the bourgeois society, gunpowder, the compass and the printing press were invented in in China.

00:17:37 Speaker 2

But but you provide a quite novel explanation linking, let's say, the top down legacy of the Roman Empire and the bottom up.

00:17:46 Speaker 2

Legacy of the Northern European Barbarians.

00:17:49 Speaker 2

Let's if we can call it like that.

00:17:51 Speaker 2

Why, in your view, then, capitalism and the way your society took place in in this part of Europe.

00:17:57 Speaker 3

We're trying to explain when we look, you know, after developing this tripod distinction between this balance of States and society, we we, you know, we tried to ask a historical question, which is why did parts of the world get into different places in this diagram?

00:18:13 Speaker 3

In some sense, like where do?

00:18:14 Speaker 3

These historical balances of power come from.

00:18:17 Speaker 3

And the more we read, the more we thought.

00:18:18 Speaker 3

This is a.

00:18:19 Speaker 3

Very deep kind of historical question.

00:18:22 Speaker 3

And the pivotal moment sees in Europe, as you say, seems to be this moment where.

00:18:28 Speaker 3

These very participatory Germanic institutions, as described by Tacitus.

00:18:32 Speaker 3

Get fused with late Roman state institutions and institutionalized.

00:18:38 Speaker 3

We make this point about how these participatory these mechanisms of accountability get institutionalized in the Merovingian and Carolingian dynasties in France.

00:18:48 Speaker 3



And I think you thought about.

00:18:49 Speaker 3

Europe and you thought about like parliaments, where were the parliaments?

00:18:53 Speaker 3

Where were the these representative institutions?

00:18:55 Speaker 3

Historically, it's actually all the places where the Carolingians got to.

00:18:59 Speaker 3

That's where they work and I think that's not a coincidence.

00:19:01 Speaker 3

And that's the basis of this institutional dynamic, this red Queen effect in the corridor cause it plays out over a long period of time.

00:19:10 Speaker 3

There's feudalism in between.

00:19:13 Speaker 3

It takes a long time to get to a point where you can have something like the industrial revolution, but that's the kind of deep roots.

00:19:19 Speaker 3

Of the of the institution, and then we, when we look at China, we sort of say, well, if you go back far enough in Chinese history, it's not that you don't see similar types of things, but then there's almost like an intellectual revolution in China.

00:19:32 Speaker 3

There's almost a model, I guess, which is outside the scope of.

00:19:35 Speaker 3

Our theory, at least for the moment.

00:19:37 Speaker 3

There's this way, this way of organizing the state emerges under these legalist philosophers and that creates this very despotic dynasty.

00:19:48 Speaker 3

That's the Chinese model and the Chinese model is enormously persistent, who?

00:19:52 Speaker 3

Read Shang Yang, who was one of the kind of intellectual founders of this organization of Chinese society.

00:19:58 Speaker 3

He wrote about 100 years before the 1st dynasty. You.

00:20:01 Speaker 3

Know if you read.

00:20:02 Speaker 3

It the parts of his writings that are that remain.

00:20:05 Speaker 3

It's a lot like.

00:20:05 Speaker 3

The philosophy of the current communist.

00:20:08 Speaker 3

Nate, we quote some of it.

00:20:09 Speaker 3

It's really extraordinary.

00:20:11

That's just.

00:20:12 Speaker 3

Say small differences have enormous differences cumulatively, like our view of.

00:20:16 Speaker 3

The world is.

00:20:16 Speaker 3

Not there's no reason why Western Europe.

00:20:19 Speaker 3

Kind of did what it did.

00:20:21 Speaker 3

There's no factor of geography or climate or people love.

00:20:25 Speaker 3

All these deterministic theories, but everywhere I've worked in the world, they've always struck me as being completely implausible.

00:20:31 Speaker 3

It's the type of societies and institutions that people.

00:20:35 Speaker 3

Or build that, determine the prosperity and the governance of the of of their, of their societies, and that often those divergences are often rooted in pretty idiosyncratic factors historically.

00:20:48 Speaker 2

I agree, and I think you documented extraordinarily well in your book.

00:20:51 Speaker 2

Having said that, I would like also to say that it's it's not coincidental either that the Merovingian and Carolingian were also Christian states.

00:21:00 Speaker 2

With their own political philosophers that emphasize the the separation of the church and the state, for example, that the first universities and centers of knowledge were created.

00:21:10 Speaker 2

There and I would say that there are numerous scholars from historians like Tom Holland, philosophers like Larry Siedentop, economists like Jonathan Schultz and evolutionary psychologists like Joseph Henrich, that have been from very different points of view and methodologies.

00:21:27 Speaker 2

Recently advancing the hypothesis that religion.

00:21:30 Speaker 2

Or the Western Church as an institution, or Christianity with the values of equality for all individuals, men, men and women, and so.

00:21:38 Speaker 2

On was key.

00:21:39 Speaker 2

For for development.

00:21:41 Speaker 2

And I think your book God is pretty absent.

00:21:45 Speaker 2

Religion is pretty absent and and Christianity is also pretty.

00:21:50 Speaker 2

What do you think about this?

00:21:52 Speaker 2

Let's say religion inspired explanations.

00:21:56 Speaker 3

I would say the King Clovis who started the Merovingian dynasty, converted to Christianity, was with his entire army.

00:22:04 Speaker 3

I would say that's all part of the late Roman state that he Co opted.

00:22:07 Speaker 3

He Co opted the church as well as kind of administrative.

00:22:10 Speaker 3

Institutions and lawyer lawyers, that was all part of the state institutions in the late Roman Empire.

00:22:16 Speaker 3

And so yes, he did that.

00:22:18 Speaker 3

And sure, that helped him consolidate his all.

00:22:21 Speaker 3

What's the role of religion more generally?

00:22:24 Speaker 3

I don't know.

00:22:25 Speaker 3

I think that hasn't been researched very well.

00:22:26 Speaker 3

In my opinion, the hypothesis that you're talking about, that this papal revolution in the Middle Ages destroyed kinship systems and that what distinguishes Western society from large other parts of the world is you have these extended families and clans that it's much more individualistic.

00:22:45 Speaker 3

But I think the fact of the matter is.

00:22:47 Speaker 3

No historian actually believes that these kinship systems existed in Europe in the Middle Ages.

00:22:53 Speaker 3

If you read the literature on Britain, it's absolutely clear that there was nothing there for the church to destroy.

00:22:58 Speaker 3

You don't have these kind of kinship systems that you see in sub-Saharan Africa or Afghanistan or New Guinea. They never existed. To our knowledge, the German.

00:23:07 Speaker 3

Tribes were not organised like that and certainly you know if you read lock blocks book feudal society you can see that they didn't exist.

00:23:14 Speaker 3

So I don't know whatever.

00:23:15 Speaker 3

The church was supposed to have done.

00:23:16 Speaker 3

It didn't do that because they weren't there to start with.

00:23:19 Speaker 3

So I don't buy that hypothesis at all, but I I do think religion is obviously a big part of human society, more or less every human society.

00:23:28

I think there's a lot.

00:23:29 Speaker 3

Of confusion about the facts in that literature.

00:23:32 Speaker 3

You know, let me give you one example.

00:23:34 Speaker 3

People say all sorts of completely erroneous things about African religion.

00:23:38 Speaker 3

If you study African religion.

00:23:40 Speaker 3

African religions are monotheistic absolutely everywhere in Soto, in West Africa it they're monotheistic, they have a God and they have a moral God.

00:23:49 Speaker 3

Also God is moral, whether it's chuku in Ebo land or whatever.

00:23:54 Speaker 3

But in the data sets I see it's endlessly miscoded, so I think like there's a lot of coding on the dependent variable there.

00:24:01 Speaker 3

You know, Africans are poor and Africans are Africans.

00:24:04 Speaker 3

Can't have monotheistic religions like us and they mustn't.

00:24:07 Speaker 3

The gods mustn't be moral.

00:24:09 Speaker 3

So that's another problem I have.

00:24:10 Speaker 3

Whenever I look at the data sets and I compare it to places.

00:24:13 Speaker 3

I know, I think like, oh gosh.

00:24:16 Speaker 3

I think the topic is really interesting and I agree if you if you accuse me of having under researched religion, I'd accept that.

00:24:23 Speaker 3

But I think I remain to be convinced.

00:24:26 Speaker 2

Let's continue on this, but taking a a broader perspective, not talking only about religion, but about culture or social norms, many social scientists from, let's say, more conservative ones like Robert Putnam, his study and the importance of social capital to more liberal ones like Rothstein and Eleanor.

00:24:44 Speaker 2

Or strong on the importance of social trust and norms.

00:24:47 Speaker 2

All would agree that on the fact that the development of norms in many cases, thick norms of helping others, paying taxes and so on are essential for the development of a country, then they can be related or not.

00:24:58 Speaker 2

Many people would claim to religious beliefs or not.

00:25:01 Speaker 2

But in the narrow corridor you use this expression.

00:25:05 Speaker 2

That I also think is quite original, at least I am not very used to to read it of the cage of norms.

00:25:10 Speaker 2

So you you give a negatives kind of connotation to the idea of norms.

00:25:16 Speaker 2

You know, for example, to explain the problems of development in India, which is very clear with the caste system and so on.

00:25:23 Speaker 2

The question is when?

00:25:24 Speaker 2

Do you think that these social norms stop being beneficial for a society and become a cage when norms are a cage or and when norms are a trampoline for for prosperity?

00:25:36 Speaker 3

We made this particular point in the narrow corridor about how in these in these societies, which don't have a very effective centralized states, often.

00:25:44 Speaker 3

The society adapts to that by proliferating these norms, which kind of stabilize order and and and relationships, so that that's what we call the cage of laws, because that's an impediment to kind of building a a different sort of society and probably a society that works better for the.

00:26:02 Speaker 3

I would say, you know my my answer might be a bit like my answer to on religion, which is I think that.

00:26:09 Speaker 3

I understand what you're saying and.

00:26:10 Speaker 3

I but for.

00:26:11 Speaker 3

Every example people have, I can always think of a counter.

00:26:14 Speaker 3

It's on.

00:26:15 Speaker 3

If you want to be in a place with most associate go go talk mentioning Robert Putnam's great great book on Italy, where he sort of points out that the in the north of Italy there's all this associational life and people interact and then they trust each other and that creates.

00:26:30 Speaker 3

The government, if you want to go to a place with really, really dense associational life, try going to an African village, try going to a village in Nigeria or Sierra Leone like, there's so many ways in which society are organised as cross cutting institutions and associations and societies and.

00:26:47 Speaker 3

So that problem, that hypothesis has a problem generalizing outside of the context in which it was developed, I always think.

00:26:54 Speaker 3

Do I think culture is important?

00:26:57 Speaker 3

I think undeniably one of the things when we talk about political transitions or we talk about the development of modern state institutions in Britain, say in the 17th century, which is a big, big thing in both.

00:27:09 Speaker 3

Of our books, is it a?

00:27:10 Speaker 3

Coincidence that Hobbs.

00:27:12 Speaker 3

Wrote his famous book about the nature of the state.

00:27:15 Speaker 3

And Locke wrote his famous book about the governance of the state at the time of the Glorious Revolution, where Hobbes secularized the state and had this idea that this was a consequence of a social contract that people bought into rather than the divine rights of kings.

00:27:29 Speaker 3

I think that was probably very powerful in giving people ways of thinking about society and reorganizing society in a more inclusive way.

00:27:37 Speaker 3

So I think there's a sort of coevolution of political culture you could say in that context and power relations and.

00:27:45 Speaker 3

Why haven't we?

00:27:46 Speaker 3

Written about that.

00:27:47 Speaker 3

Ohh gosh, you know across.

00:27:49 Speaker 3

Because there's only two of us.



00:27:51 Speaker 3

I would say, however, that.

00:27:52 Speaker 3

We've been thinking a lot about that.

00:27:55 Speaker 3

Don't expect anything on religion, but you might expect to see something on political culture coming soon.

00:28:01 Speaker 2

Well, we will be really to eager to to read it.

00:28:06 Speaker 2

An underlying assumption of your book is that the people, the masses, are wise and where normally would read quite the opposite in the sense that you praising the book a lot, social mobilization and you talk, for example, about the brave suffragettes.

00:28:21 Speaker 2

That risked their lives for female so fresh, no doubt that that was truly heroic.

00:28:28 Speaker 2

But maybe there is also bad social activism.

00:28:31 Speaker 2

And what do you think about that we see also in developed societies in the 60s and the 70s, the how many intellectuals were captive by red terrorism, red brigades and and these kind of things.

00:28:43 Speaker 2

And now there are movements to defund the police in the US or so on.

00:28:48 Speaker 2

And I don't know if they're gonna be good for society or not.

00:28:51 Speaker 2

So do you have maybe a a naive view of social mobilization?

00:28:56 Speaker 2

Or maybe you do expose rationalization of movements and forgetting that there?

00:29:00 Speaker 2

Been many, many bad social mobilization and and and I stopped the parentheses because I really think that your tuition of the how wise the the masses think it's more empirically correct that the people that claim that are societies are fooled by populist leaders, for example very, very quickly.

00:29:20 Speaker 3

I think that's just the price.

00:29:21 Speaker 3

You have to pay for having an inclusive society if you're going to create the space.

00:29:26 Speaker 3

And opportunities for mobilization, then you're you're bound to get pretty idiosyncratic, nutty things as well.

00:29:32 Speaker 3

Just look at religion.

00:29:33 Speaker 3

Just look at the types of religions that pop up.

00:29:35 Speaker 3

People with different types of beliefs or whatever, and the Mormons, you know, it's like somebody comes along an entrepreneur with an idea and sort of says look at it.

00:29:44 Speaker 3

Look at the world like this.

00:29:45 Speaker 3

Or why don't you think of the world like this and you can get adherence and it can even be incredibly successful.

00:29:49 Speaker 3

But so I think that's just the price you have to pay.

00:29:52 Speaker 3

But I think on average I would say that this is a force that does create a much more inclusive society and you just have to be prepared to put up.

00:30:00 Speaker 3

The types of things you're describing, the Red Brigade or the Father, my father, mind or faction or whatever, yeah.

00:30:07 Speaker 2

In the Financial Times, there was an article a few years ago on which type of dystopia is more likely to happen.

00:30:13 Speaker 2

George Orwell's 1984 Big Brother is watching, as you also cite in your book when talking about China, a sort of digital dictatorship.

00:30:22 Speaker 2

Where you are.

00:30:23 Speaker 2

Get punished if you buy, for example, alcohol in a in the supermarket or so.

00:30:28 Speaker 2

Or Aldous Huxley Brave new World that is, we humans will be addicted to some sort of drug.

00:30:34 Speaker 2

Enjoy individual.

00:30:36 Speaker 2

Measures that say connected to Facebook, social media or virtual reality, politically, sleep and non mobilizing at the mercy of big corporations, big tech corporations.

00:30:48 Speaker 2

So what do you think is what is the main challenge for the narrow corridor for the future?

00:30:53 Speaker 2

This is the dictatorship by government or by.

00:30:56 Speaker 2

Big tech or corporations?

00:30:59 Speaker 3

Maybe you should invite a science fiction author onto your show.

00:31:03 Speaker 3

I I don't know the answer to that I.

00:31:05 Speaker 3

I think our picture of the.

00:31:07 Speaker 3

World is that there's all this persistence history doesn't end.

00:31:11 Speaker 3

I think we're seeing that right at this very moment, this idea of history end ending is a kind of very implausible idea, and it shows how confused we can get.

00:31:21 Speaker 3

By present events in 1990, somehow we we extrapolated something completely erroneous into the future, and I think that's one of our points about China. Like everyone looks at what's happened to China in the previous ten years and assumes that's what's gonna happen over the next 100 years and I think.

00:31:36 Speaker 3

That's very foolish.

00:31:38 Speaker 3

So you have to look at.

00:31:39 Speaker 3

The history, but the world.

00:31:40 Speaker 3

Also changes technology changes the way you're discussing and in in such a way as to create very different futures.

00:31:47 Speaker 3

I guess you could say potential futures, but I'm not sure I have anything intelligent to say about that.

00:31:52 Speaker 3

I think in the US I mean, I tend to think that what's happening in the US is that there's all sorts of.

00:31:58 Speaker 3

Protests against what's happening?

00:32:00 Speaker 3

It's creating all sorts of alienation and marginalization in the society and in some sense, that's what this whole Trump thing is about.

00:32:08 Speaker 3

I think The thing is confusing because because Trump is so confusing.

00:32:12 Speaker 3

He's such a bundle of contradictions.

00:32:14 Speaker 3

But underneath.

00:32:14 Speaker 3

It there's a.

00:32:15 Speaker 3

Social rebellion against the way this society is organized against this kind of meritocratic, so-called meritocratic system, where merit is determined by Harvard and Princeton, and Yale, and this kind of all these billionaires are this idea, this rise of, like, free market philosophy, where you get what you deserve.

00:32:34 Speaker 3

You know, so must deserves to be so rich and you deserve.

00:32:38 Speaker 3

You know you don't deserve because you're just not a success.

00:32:41 Speaker 3

This kind of.

00:32:41 Speaker 3

Extremely patronizing system that you have in the.

00:32:45 Speaker 3

United States I.

00:32:45 Speaker 3

Think it's a big social rebellion against that and it's just taking a very perverse form.

00:32:50 Speaker 3

At the moment.

00:32:51 Speaker 3

But I think it will, I think.

00:32:52 Speaker 3

Ultimately, it's actually going.

00:32:53 Speaker 3

To be very healthy, how about?

00:32:55 Speaker 3

That for a provocative conclusion.

00:32:58 Speaker 3

Because the type of reformism that's built into the Democratic Party, Hillary Clinton or whatever, is never going to change anything.

00:33:05

And actually I.

00:33:06 Speaker 3

Don't think it's targeted at the.

00:33:07 Speaker 3

Right thing either people.

00:33:08 Speaker 3

Don't want handouts in this country, they want.

00:33:12 Speaker 3

They want their contribution to society to be recognized, they want dignity and that's that's not on the table yet.

00:33:19 Speaker 3

And of course, it won't be on the table.

00:33:20 Speaker 3

From Donald Trump.

00:33:21 Speaker 3

But somehow he's managed to tap into that discontent in a way which is quite mysterious to many of us.

00:33:27 Speaker 3

Like you know.

00:33:28 Speaker 3

That that's a hard question.

00:33:30 Speaker 2

I think no fiction writer could have replied better than you.

00:33:34 Speaker 2

And then James, just the final question, moving from the future to the present, in a thought provoking work written without an alchemical and theory Verdier, you claim that the Nordic style capitalism may provide higher welfare, but in an interconnected.

00:33:50 Speaker 2

Well, it may be the cut throat.

00:33:53 Speaker 2

US capitalism with its extended inequalities that makes possible existence of more.

00:34:00 Speaker 2

Actually, Nordic societies.

00:34:02 Speaker 2

So connecting this with your book, the narrow corridor which type of state is, in your opinion better for sustaining the narrow corridor and Nordic European welfare state like the one I am talking to you now, Sweden with high social protection, high taxes or an Anglo-Saxon 1?

00:34:19 Speaker 3

That's an academic article we were trying to make a particular point that countries can't freely choose their institutions independent of other peoples institutions, that there's a kind of world.

00:34:30 Speaker 3

Room and there's all sorts of interconnections in terms of economic growth and things like that. So that paper was written in the wake of 2000.

00:34:37 Speaker 3

And eight where?

00:34:39 Speaker 3

We were at a conference actually in Prague where everyone was saying the Anglo-Saxon model of capitalism is kind of intellectually bankrupt and everybody should be adopting a Social Democratic welfare state.

00:34:49 Speaker 3

And then.

00:34:50 Speaker 3

That's just kind of trying to pose an intellectual question.

00:34:54 Speaker 3

Well, how, how free are we to just independently vary our institutions and what are the consequences of that?

00:35:01 Speaker 3

That's an academic paper thinking about one set of mechanisms.

00:35:05 Speaker 3

If I want to answer your question, I need to think about more mechanisms than just in that one kind of mathematical model, I think.

00:35:12 Speaker 3

By world historical standards, Scandinavia might be the most successful societies ever created, just in terms of average levels of welfare and public good provision and cooperation.

00:35:26 Speaker 3

So I think the Scandinavian experience is, is a kind of remarkable experience.

00:35:31 Speaker 3

You could say, well, OK, but you know, one of the points about that paper is everywhere can't be like Scandinavia and that maybe that's right.

00:35:37 Speaker 3

The United States is much more heterogeneous.

00:35:39 Speaker 3

The history of the United States is very different.

00:35:42 Speaker 3

There's this bitter history of slavery or frontier.

00:35:46 Speaker 3

Expansion of disposition of indigenous people that you don't have in Sweden, so maybe there's a sort of sociological challenge which is more difficult, but on the other hand, if you go back and look at Sweden in the 1920s and 1930s, it wasn't so hard.

00:35:58 Speaker 3

Is either.

00:36:00 Speaker 3

I would say there's a lot of contradictions and problems in the.

00:36:03 Speaker 3

United States, yes.

00:36:04 Speaker 3

It has been very technologically dynamic for the past 100 years and sometimes the whole world has benefited from that.

00:36:11 Speaker 3

All the past 150 years, the whole world has benefited from that. But that's not to say that other societies couldn't be just as technologically.

00:36:19 Speaker 3

Develop this is a long conversation that that was.

00:36:22 Speaker 3

A very specific kind.

00:36:23 Speaker 3

Of project where we were trying to illustrate a particular kind of intellectual point.

00:36:29 Speaker 3

And I as I.

00:36:29 Speaker 3

Say I think to evaluate which model of.

00:36:32 Speaker 3

I don't think you can freely choose your model of the world.

00:36:35 Speaker 3

That's the that's the problem.

00:36:37 Speaker 3



It would be very difficult for the United States to turn itself into Sweden.

00:36:40 Speaker 3

I think it could turn itself into something much better than it is, but.

00:36:44 Speaker 2

And but Sweden is definitely becoming more heterogeneous, and that can be seen as a bad thing or that can be seen as a an opportunity as we can conclude for your from your answer.

00:36:55 Speaker 2

Well, James, we have to finish our conversation now.

00:36:59 Speaker 2

It has been a great pleasure talking to you.

00:37:01 Speaker 2

Thank you.

00:37:01 Speaker 2

Thank you very much.

00:37:02 Speaker 3

My pleasure. Yeah.

00:37:08 Speaker 2

Thank you very much for listening.

00:37:10 Speaker 2

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