

Lessons  Leaders

# Is Buddhism True?

A CONVERSATION WITH  
ROBERT WRIGHT



**Exclusive Summary:** My next guest is the three-time New York Times bestselling author and finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, Mr. Robert Wright. Robert writes about science, Buddhism, spirituality, politics, and many other fascinating topics. He has written for some of the most impressive institutions in the world, including The New York Times, The Atlantic, and The Republican. He is also the founder and publisher of [nonzerofoundation.org](http://nonzerofoundation.org), where he teaches people how to see politics, look past biases, and get to the root truth. In this podcast, we talk about the scientific component of Buddhism, consciousness, and his book *Why Buddhism is True*.

## Introduction

**Brian Beckcom:** Bob, thank you so much for coming on the show. You have got one of the most fascinating biographies that I've read in a very long time. You come from a Southern Baptist family in Oklahoma, military brat, ended up at Texas Christian University for a year, and your professional career is the study of evolution and in particular evolutionary psychology and the way the mind works. So there'll be a lot of people listening to the show that know who Bob Wright is, but there'll be some people that don't know who Bob Wright is. So before we get into some of the substance of your work, who is Bob Wright? How'd you end up where you are?

**Robert Wright:** That's a pretty open-ended question. Being an army brat I think was an important formative experience, and I think being from two parents who were from West Texas, rural West Texas was important. I think moving around all the time as a kid is not always pleasant, but you learn a lot. We stayed stateside after I was born. My older siblings had lived in Panama or Germany, but it was all stateside here. But still, you're moving around to different kinds of places, different cultures. I mean, moving from fifth to sixth grade in the late 1960s from Fort Monroe, Virginia to San Francisco where you're going to a public school in San Francisco, like in 1968 that was a big shift. I had never seen a hippie before. I went to San Francisco, and there were plenty, and I think I got a lot out of it.

I think you learn both. You figure out both. On the one hand, there is a common human nature. There's a sense in which everyone everywhere is the same at some level. They're reacting to the same kinds of things. They have the same needs, and the same interests at some level, but there's a lot of cultural variation. And you learn that quickly that the things that were cool or acceptable where you were before are not necessarily cool or acceptable where you are now. I think that helps you become both a student of human nature and a student of human culture.

**Brian Beckcom:** We share that in common. I think I lived in six or seven different places growing up. My dad was an Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, and so we moved around quite a bit. I was born in Louisiana, spent some time in upstate New York, and was stationed overseas on the Guam Islands. One of the neat things for me growing up on military bases was like you're saying, the military is a very diverse organization. For instance, we would go, there would be essentially three Sunday school services or three church services. One would be a Jewish service, one would be a Protestant service, and one would be a Catholic service. And so when we went to the Protestant services, we'd get to see Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, you name it, gospel choirs. So it kind of stunk growing up, moving around so much as a kid. But now I look back on it as a big benefit in my life. I've got friends all over the world, and I got to experience a lot of different things. Well, Bob, you ended up after being a military brat at Princeton, and among the many people you studied under one particular person caught my eye. That's John McPhee, who is one of the most well-known writers of creative nonfiction or narrative nonfiction. He's also a well-known writing teacher. So I'm curious to hear what your experience was studying under John McPhee.

**Robert Wright:** Well, that was very important. I mean, for one thing, taking his course, 'The Literature of Fact', gave me the confidence to try to be a writer, which I probably wouldn't have had growing up. I mean, growing up I had never known anybody who had written a book or anything. I mean, it seemed like a pretty exotic world to me. That was important. I mean, I learned a lot from him as well, about writing and he was just a good all-around role model. I still see him.

We've become good friends over the years, and he was a real inspiration both as a writer and just as a person. We have quite a bit in common in terms of our basic worldview. I mean, he's a sports fan. We talk about sports. We have similar values I think. So that's just been one of the best relationships of my life. I think maybe the most important thing I came away with in addition to all the things I learned about actual writing, was just a sense of the importance of trying to preserve your integrity as a writer, not taking shortcuts, trying to get everything right, and trying to be fair to your subjects. I have failed to do that sometimes since then, but it gives you an idea to live up to.

## Becoming a Writer

**Brian Beckcom:** When did you decide, Hey, I think I'm going to give this writing thing a shot. I think I can do this. What drew you to that, and when did you make that decision?

**Robert Wright:** I mean, actually it's funny. My mother was the first person to put the concept of journalism in my head. I guess I'd gotten positive feedback in high school from my English teachers or something about my writing, and this was when newspaper journalism was suddenly cool in a new way because it was right in the middle of Watergate. So the heroes were Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the Washington Post. I remember I was reading their book, *All the President's Men* in high school. I remember my mother was the first person kind of oddly in a way, but to suggest that I might want to be a journalist. Again, I don't think I had the confidence. I mean, I transferred to Princeton thinking I might apply to law school or something that would've been kind of safer in career terms, just in terms of your ability to make a living. I think it was the McPhee course that gave me the confidence to declare myself a freelance writer when I graduated from college. Then I quickly failed

at that. I had to borrow \$1,500 from my parents or something to stay alive. But then I got a job at a small newspaper, and then thereafter I was kind of able to make a living at it. That was a lot of fun working at a small newspaper on the Jersey Shore.

**Brian Beckcom:** What drew you to writing in journalism? I'll tell you why I asked that question, Bob. Because I'm an inveterate reader. I probably read 100, 150 books a year, and I'm sitting there during the quarantine, and I don't know if you've ever reflected on this, but I'm reading a book by **Richard Feynman**, 'Six Hard Problems.' I had just finished 'Six Easy Problems,' and I just kind of was reflecting on it and I was like, isn't this miraculous that I can sit here in Houston, Texas in 2020 in my house and open up a piece of technology and put the thoughts of one of the smartest physicists in history into my head? That just seems to me to be almost miraculous. The other thing I've been thinking about for a couple of years, Bob, is I think the most powerful force in the world, the most powerful force historically, the most powerful force now, and the most powerful force going forward is the power of ideas and ideas are primarily transmitted through either the written or the spoken word. So the power that you as a writer have is unbelievable. But I'm curious for you, what was it that drove you into this world of ideas and this world of writing? What was it that made you decide, this is something that I want to spend my professional life doing?

**Robert Wright:** It's a good question. It goes back even further than I've said. I had a good friend in San Francisco in my sixth-grade class, and we kept in touch. His name was Bill Strobridge, and we wrote letters to each other after I moved away. I remember he said he compared it to **Jim Bouton's** writing who wrote 'Ball Four'? I don't know if you know that book. I later met **Jim Bouton**.

**Brian Beckcom:** TCU also has a very well-known journalism school. Is that one of the reasons you were at TCU?

**Robert Wright:** I was majoring in journalism at the time. The reason I was there is because I got a full tuition academic scholarship and higher education hadn't been a huge tradition in my family, and I figured the idea was to do well in high school to go to college for free. And so TCU was a place to do it. I was in Texas. I graduated from high school in San Antonio. My parents were happy for me to be in Texas, but I was going to major in journalism there. I know I took a journalism course there that year. They do have a good journalism school. I had a professor who was at the time at the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

**Brian Beckcom:** Does Dan Jenkins sound familiar? The name Dan Jenkins.

**Robert Wright:** Well, I know the name. It wasn't him. It was a woman, but he was famous. Now I took a golf course at TCU for my PE requirement, and we played on a course that I'm sure Dan Jenkins had probably played on. He wrote about golf a lot.

So let's see, where were we, becoming a writer anyway? These things just happen. It's like you try it and it starts working. You get positive feedback, you stick with it. It's not like I enjoyed the process of writing. I always liked the feeling that I had written a good sentence or that after however much work it takes to polish something to a point where you're happy with it, the feeling of craftsmanship that you've done it well is a very gratifying feeling for me.

## Get Your Foot In The Door

**Brian Beckcom:** Well, you've written a number of books that have been very well received. That's the understatement of the year. I want to talk about some of the books and some of the ideas that you've put out in the world. In particular, your most recent book on Buddhism, why Buddhism is true. But before we talk about that, there'll be some young folks who are listening to the podcast, maybe some parents with kids in high school or younger who are interested in being journalists or writers or doing what you do. So do you have any advice or tips for the younger folks who are interested in becoming a professional writer, whether it be a journalist or a book author?

**Robert Wright:** Well, the game has changed a lot since I got into it. So I'm not sure how relevant my experience is. I mean, take opportunities to get published, even if you don't make a lot of money at first, because then you'll have something to show people. And if you can find a place to get good editing, people who really teach you about writing, take it. But the game has changed so much. I mean, as a journalist, I think a lower rate of productivity was acceptable when I got into the business. I mean, at the daily newspaper I worked at, we would do several pieces a day often. But I think the young journalists today are expected to do so much that if you're not pretty efficient, and I don't consider myself, you may have trouble. Obviously, read good writing, and don't be afraid to approach people you admire. You probably won't hear from them again, but you never know. I mean, because they probably won't have time to answer most of the emails they get. But if you think you might be able to strike up with a writer you admire where you do some work for them and learn something, keep an eye out for that. I guess I'm saying that in a way apprenticeships may be a little harder to get than they used to be. Because the economics of the profession have changed.

**Brian Beckcom:** That's what I was about to say, that the incentives are so much different nowadays than they were when you started in terms of clickbait and provocative headlines and things of that nature. So yeah, the incentives, and the economics have changed so much.

**Robert Wright:** Yeah, so editors don't have time to say, well, here's the reason I changed this, and here's the reason I did this to that. So it's hard. If you can find a way to get tutored by someone, good, that's a precious thing. If you can afford to sacrifice short-term income to make that happen, I would say that's very valuable. I mean, John McPhee used to say, you should only be a writer if you can't imagine being anything else. Because even then, I mean, it took real sacrifices. You probably weren't going to get rich. It wasn't, wasn't a lucrative field. It still isn't. And he found it in some respects, painful often. And so he said, look, if you're trying to decide between writing and some normal profession, take the normal profession, make it easy on yourself.

## Who Influenced You as a Writer?

**Brian Beckcom:** I'm laughing because I had a Methodist pastor friend of mine early on in the podcast, and he made the same comment. His mentor said, do not become a pastor unless that's the only thing you can imagine yourself being. Well, Bob, when I'm teaching as a lawyer, I do a lot of writing and a lot of reading. I've been into writing and studying writing. I've written a lot of articles

myself, and I'm interested in the topic. And so when I have young lawyers at my firm, some of the advice I give 'em is, read Earnest Hemmingway and then read Faulkner, and don't write like Faulkner, write like Hemmingway, write powerfully and direct because, in my profession, that's the best way to communicate. For you, who are two or three of the writers or authors that you most look up to that formed and had something to do with the way you look at the writing process?

**Robert Wright:** Well, I'll tell you the second person who had a big influence on me after McPhee was Mike Kinsley, who was an editor. He was the star editor, kind of his generation magazine editor and writer. And he had already been an editor of Harper's when I came under his kind of influence. He was an editor at The New Republic. When he hired me, I worked for him in Washington. This was a time when, of course, before the internet, The New Republic was kind of the hot political magazine in Washington. It was through his work that it had become a great place to work, a very valued job. Mike just writes with such crispness, analytical sharpness and clarity, like John McPhee, he was a good role model in terms of his integrity. He's intellectually honest. He doesn't take shortcuts. He doesn't score cheap points when he's critiquing someone's ideas. He doesn't attack, but he writes with humor, crispness, and verb. And I think he was good for me because I tend to, by nature, write very continuously in the sense that I worry a lot about the transition from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph, and maybe I worry too much. And Mike writes in a kind of more staccato kind of burst where the connections of things are clear enough, but he's not holding your hand as much as I'm feeling inclined to do.

Now, I'll tell you just some people, you were mentioning writers, F. Scott Fitzgerald is a beautiful writer. I think John Updike is a beautiful writer. John Cheever, a short story writer. So there's a lot I really admire. All those writers write with tremendous grace and kind of beauty. There's a sense of command. There's a sense that they didn't work to do it, even though of course they did probably. There aren't many people beautiful sentences flow naturally out of, but there's a sense that it just flows very easily, but there's a real clarity to it. So there's a lot of writers out there to admire.

**Brian Beckcom:** Can I give you another writer that I really admire, a lot whose works have had a big influence on me? You write beautifully. The ideas you communicate are, to say I'm excited about 'em would again be a huge understatement because I think that the ideas that you talk about, the ideas of consciousness, morality, evolution, evolutionary psychology, things of that nature, Buddhism, my sense Bob right now is that there are a lot of different fields that are kind of converging on the same basic ideas, like the same basic question. So let's jump into some of your writings. Before we get into that, would it be fair to say that your writings have been heavily influenced by what some people call the field of evolutionary psychology?

**Robert Wright:** It has. I mean, you said early that evolution was a unifying theme in my writing, it is, but I would extend that to include cultural evolution, which my book *Nonzero* was about, and my book, *The Evolution of God* was about. That is to say, a process that is in some ways analogous to biological evolution, although in certain respects, messier and more amorphous, but just the way bodies of religious belief evolve. They change, some ideas are retained, and some are dropped by the wayside. Science evolves, strictly speaking, cultural evolution by one kind of, well broad definition in a way is all information that is transmitted non-genetically between people. That is all subject to



evolution. That has gotten us where we are today. So at a social level, it's gotten us from hunter-gatherer society to the brink of globalization to the brink of two globalization and the brink of forming a cohesive global community. One of my current obsessions is trying to help that happen. I mean, as opposed to the alternative fall of chaos and war. So anyway, I would say, but that's just a tangent that we can let go for now. Yes, you're right. Evolutionary psychology. That was one of the first, back before it was called evolutionary psychology. First in high school when I understood the theory of natural selection just as an explanation for biological life. But then in college when I understood particular ideas that form the foundation of evolutionary psychology, in particular kin selection, which explains why relatives may be inclined through evolution to extend altruism to one another, to kin, I became a true believer first in evolution, Darwinism in high school and then in college in the kinds of ideas that do constitute evolutionary psychology. Absolutely.

**Brian Beckcom:** I'm a little embarrassed to admit this, but I had a chance over the quarantine to read *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins, which I was familiar with evolution and all the ideas behind that. But man, what a beautifully written book. I question whether Professor Dawkins communicates some of his ideas in the nicest and maybe the best way that would be a whole other conversation. But one of the things that I found interesting about the selfish gene was at the very end where Dawkins essentially introduces the concept of the meme, which is like you're talking about that is a non-biological but self-replicating unit. But I'll tell you my awakening experience, Bob. I remember very specifically when this happened, in 2016 during the election, I remember I would sit there and watch the debates between Trump and Hillary Clinton with my wife, and after the debates, we'd say, well, man, Hillary really did a good job. She'd beat the crap, but he didn't know what he was talking about. Then I would call my dad who has a college and master's degree and is a phenomenal human being, a great guy. And he'd say, man, Trump really beat the what out of her. I was sitting there asking myself, how could it possibly be that two educated people of good faith could literally watch the same thing and come to these different conclusions? So that really led me into the study of consciousness, cognitive biases, meditation, Buddhism, and a lot of the stuff you write about. But in any event, I think what we're talking about here, folks, is there's biological evolution and then there is evolution that's not biological, whether you call it psychological evolution, cultural evolution, whatever you want to call it. But that's the underlying theme of a lot of your work.

## The Evolution of God

**Brian Beckcom:** You mentioned one of your books, which, by the way, your books have won tons of awards. They've done very, very well. We can talk about whatever books you want to talk about, but I'm curious about your book, *The Evolution of God*, which if I were to summarize that book in one sentence, I would say God and the concept of God have evolved and God's a lot more chill now than he was 500 years ago. What are the major ideas you were trying to communicate in that book?

**Robert Wright:** Well, one was, as you suggest to view religion as an evolutionary process and explain that argue that monotheism did grow almost seamlessly out of earlier religions that were not at all monotheistic. But I had a couple of agendas in the course of telling the story. Most of the book is about three kind of big developments within the Abrahamic tradition. Once I tell the story of pre-Abrahamic religion and get up to the story of ancient Israel and the emergence of monotheism in

Israel, I then move on and tell the story of the birth of Christianity and the birth of Islam. So that's the narrative. But my agenda certainly included conveying something that I think is very important. I mean, I started thinking about this book in the aftermath of 9/11, and my view of kind of the connection between religion and I guess belligerence, and this is something that the so-called New Atheists, including Richard Dawkins, get wrong. They think that religion is the problem when you have militant Islam, if you have radical Muslims or radical Christians or radical anything else, they think if you could only turn them into atheists, everything would be fine.

My view is no, actually, they just have grievances and whatever religion they happen to have is going to be the medium through which that's expressed. So what I tried to show in the evolution of God was that basically with any religion, whatever the text, I don't mean that the text doesn't matter. I don't mean it doesn't matter whether your basic text is the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament or the Quran. They do have different characteristics that are not completely without importance. But I think any religious group, if you want them to find in their scripture the basis for being charitable toward another group and friendly toward another group, and go find those passages in the scripture that say, be kind to the stranger and so on, you have to put them in a non-zero-sum relationship with the other group. In other words, give them the sense that there can be a win-win relationship between you. It could be a commercial relationship, like we can do business. That's a great source of amity between people is to convince them that they can mutually profit or that maybe they can unite to fend off some common threat. But the point is, if they view you as threatening, they're going to find in their scripture a basis for hating and killing you. I mean, we hope it won't go that far, but that's when this kind of thing tends to happen. And if they don't view you as threatening, whatever their religion is, they're much less likely to find a basis for belligerence in the religion. So I think rather than do what the new atheists want to do, which is try to convince people that they're fools for believing in God, try to structure the world such that people can gain through interaction. That was one big agenda.

There's also separate from that, the fact that my own belief, although I've lost my Christian faith, I do believe that when you look at, well the direction of biological evolution and subsequent cultural evolution, although I explain those things in strictly materialist conventional terms, Darwinian natural selection, I view cultural evolution as in a sense of material process that obeys certain laws. It still seems to me that the direction, the whole process is suggestive of the possibility that it does serve some larger purpose. So I've argued that although in a way as an afterthought in both of these books, but I've argued that in *Nonzero* and in *The Evolution of God*. One of the arguments in the *Evolution of God* is that even if we stand back and view the evolution of religion in these very clinical terms, the way a social scientist might, that doesn't mean there's no higher purpose. You don't necessarily have to abandon the notion of a higher purpose or of transcendent meaning or however you want to put it.

**Brian Beckcom:** And I think the important point, tell me if I'm characterizing this correctly, the important point, one of the important points in the *Evolution of God* is you weren't speaking to the divine itself. You were speaking more to people's conception of the divine and how that evolves over time. So for instance, if I'm remembering right, and I'm not a biblical scholar by a long shot, but I think it was in Leviticus where they have 'Love thy neighbor.' In any event, everybody's pretty familiar with the concept of love thy neighbor. Well, back when those words were written, your neighbor was

literally your family. It wasn't the people in the tribe next door. So that concept, is a good example of one of the things you were talking about that evolves over time. In other words, it's not necessarily the words and the text themselves, it's the situation in which those words are read and interpreted. Is that a fair characterization?

**Robert Wright:** Yeah, I think so. I mean, religions tend to serve certain social functions. That's why I think as you move from a hunter-gatherer society, enforcing the law, so to speak, there is no written law or anything, but enforcing the rules is not a huge challenge. I mean, it's not like you can steal somebody's stuff and run away.

**Brian Beckcom:** Well, you could, but you'd last about two days, right?

**Robert Wright:** Well, right. And by and large, it's a small society where everyone knows who everyone is. It's hard to do things secretly and in private. So a lot of the law enforcement problems that you see in larger societies don't exist, at least in very large magnitude. And so I think it's no coincidence that it's mainly when you get to the larger ancient kind of urban societies or even chieftain level societies, but certainly, the ancient urban societies where you start seeing religions that offer more rewards and punishments for good and bad behavior. You don't see as much of that in the hunter-gatherer religions, including the idea that there will be rewards in the afterlife for people who don't steal and don't cheat and so on. And that's an example of the part of religion evolving to meet the needs of the social structure and other ideas also evolve to meet those needs. I think right now we're in a time where the world as a whole needs to, we need to see new ideas evolve that are conducive to a kind of congealing at the global level, at least to enough harmony at the global level that we can solve the growing number of problems that I think can be solved only through international cooperation. So we need the evolution of ideas and so on to continue. And that's one thing I'm interested in.

## The Moral Animal

**Brian Beckcom:** It kind of sounds like you were right. I'm sure you're familiar with the work of Yuval Harari. He talks a lot about various fictions that have been useful in coordinating large groups of human beings. It sounds like you were writing about that using maybe different words and different concepts 25 years before Yuval Harari was writing about it. You also wrote a book, I think, *The Moral Animal*, which my one-sentence summary of that book would be that who are we really, once you strip away all the superficial crud, who are humans really, and why do they do what they do? Is that a fair summary of your book, *The Moral Animal*?

**Robert Wright:** Yeah, specifically when the field of evolutionary psychology was just emerging, that was published in 1994. When I started working on the book, I had never heard the term evolutionary psychology. I knew I was working on people who studied how evolution shaped the human mind, but I hadn't heard the term. It kind of came to my awareness as I was writing the book. And so, yeah, the question is why we are the way we are and including some unfortunate ways we are. I mean, you mentioned earlier that you would watch the Trump Clinton debates and have a very different perspective from your father's. I know the feeling, three of my four siblings voted for Trump. And one



thing you learn from thinking about how natural selection shaped the human brain is we're not necessarily designed to perceive the objective truth. What the theory of natural selection says is that genes that give rise to traits that help the genes get into the next generation are the genes that will survive. So if genes incline us to a kind of warped perception that helps get the genes into the next generation, then those kinds of perceptions will be favored. And this explains a lot of what is sometimes called the psychology of tribalism. It also explains cognitive biases, like the most famous is confirmation bias, where we notice and embrace information consistent with our preexisting views. We don't notice or reject information inconsistent with it. I mean, these are not the hallmarks of a machine designed to ascertain the truth, right?

**Brian Beckcom:** That's right. I'm sitting here chuckling. There's a great Buddhist anecdote that talks about you walking in the forest and out of the corner of your eye, you see a snake and you start and you get a burst of adrenaline, and it turns out it's a stick. That's kind of what you're talking about. You clearly did not perceive that accurately, but you perceived it in such a way that it's been programmed to help your genes replicate across the generations. I don't know if you've ever been on YouTube and seen these cat videos where they stick a cucumber next to a cat and a cat just goes insane.

The cat thinks it's a snake. And so they'll put the cucumber kind of right behind the cat, and these cats just, I mean, they jump 10 feet in the air and spin around. It's crazy how they're programmed to react to these.

**Robert Wright:** Because better safe than sorry. Right? I mean, similarly, we overestimate the speed of approaching objects better to get out of the way too soon than too late. When we are tired, we overestimate the slope of a hill that we're looking up at. If we're thinking about walking up it the way our brain, rather than send the message, hey, you're tired, maybe it's a bad idea to start that hike. The brain just distorts your perception of how steep the thing is. Our perception is distorted.

**Brian Beckcom:** There's another way that it's distorted. I think there's been a lot of study in the field of psychedelics. There's been kind of a renaissance in the study of psychedelics and one of the theories is the reason psilocybin and some of these other psychedelic compounds have the effects they do is because they turn off the default mode network. And so the other evolutionary adaptation, Bob, is not only are we interpreting information in a non-objective way, but we're also not getting all the information. Because if we did, we'd be totally overwhelmed constantly. So we have, there's a filter not only a kind of misinterpretation mechanism, but there's also a filtering mechanism in our brain.

**Robert Wright:** You notice this as you get older and you realize no one is looking at you. It's like, I mean, certainly nobody younger than you. It's like, why should they? You're just not relevant. You're not the mate they're looking for. You're not the friend they're looking for. You're not even the rival. They're alert to. Yeah, it's super selective, and fortunately it is, but the selectivity can be accompanied by certain kinds of unfortunate biases. For sure.

## Why Buddhism is True

**Brian Beckcom:** One of the things I was hoping to achieve in this particular podcast, Bob, and I hope we get a chance to get to this near the end, is you've done a ton of work. You have a newsletter called Non-Zero, which I look forward to every time you publish it. Essentially, at least the way I see it, your newsletter is an attempt to educate people about these different cognitive biases we have, and then talk about how we can overcome these politically as a country, economically, things like that to get things back on track. So let's jump to my favorite book. You've written *Why Buddhism is True*, and that's clearly to some people a provocative title. I would just tell people right up front that Buddhism, has a secular component, what I would call almost a scientific component, and then there's a kind of supernatural component. In my reading of your book at least, you're focused almost exclusively on the secular part of Buddhism, not the spiritual or the supernatural part of Buddhism.

**Robert Wright:** I'm not talking about rebirth being born after death as a different being. I'm not talking about any of the deities or anything else. I'm talking about the parts of Buddhism you could call naturalistic. That is to say they're susceptible to being evaluated from the standpoint of modern psychology, modern philosophy. And I think they hold up well, even though some of them sound radical like that we live in a world of delusion. I mean, you can sense already some of the connection between evolutionary psychology and my defense of Buddhism.

Buddhism says we in various ways don't see the real world. And there are radical ideas in Buddhism like that. The self doesn't exist. The idea that everything you see is in some sense empty or empty of essence, and these things sound either kind of crazy or just kind of hard to fathom. But I argue that they have more merit than you might think. I argue that certainly the fundamental promise of Buddhism mystery, the idea is that the reason first is the diagnosis. The way I put the fundamental diagnosis of Buddhism is the reason we suffer and make other people suffer is because we don't see the world clearly. When you think about it, it'd be great if it's that simple, then you just see more clearly and suddenly you're happy and you're no longer being mean to people. The relationship among those things is that simple. The trouble is seeing the world clearly is very, very hard. I think evolutionary psychology tells us why that is. These, the cognitive biases and other subtle distortions are deeply built into us. I think it takes a discipline like mindfulness or meditation. It's not the only way to do it, and Buddhism isn't the only way to tackle the challenge of being born with these brains that weren't designed to always see things clearly or to always be nice to people.

I do think Buddhism offers some powerful tools like mindfulness and meditation that helps us with effort to see the world more clearly. I think when that starts happening, you see how it does work, that you suffer less, you're somewhat happier, and you're being less of a jerk to other people. You're being more decent toward other people, more considerate. That's the basic idea behind the book. There is a strong connection to the evolutionary psychology. I mean, you called the title *Why Buddhism is True*. You said some people might find it provocative. Well, everyone finds it provocative. Some people find it obnoxious and not without reason, I have to say. If you ask, why do I feel that I'm qualified after Buddhism has been chewed over for 2,500 years, who am I to suddenly say, now I know why it's true. I'm not claiming to have had any special insight. My point is that evolutionary psychology, which only has crystallized very recently, sheds a lot of new light on why I

think the Buddhist fundamental diagnosis of the problem is correct and why some of the techniques employed by Buddhism to address the problem are effective.

**Brian Beckcom:** So what excites me about this so much, Bob, is that it's not just evolutionary psychology, but I have a computer science undergraduate degree and a philosophy degree. There's been a lot of work in artificial intelligence. There are a lot of ideas right now about what happens if we ever reach artificial general intelligence, and who knows when we'll get there. There's a lot of talk about whether consciousness or intelligence is substrate-dependent. In other words, is there something special about the biology of the human brain that makes consciousness arise spontaneously? Or could you build a machine and if it had the right information processing power and everything organized in the right way, would consciousness emerge the hard problem of consciousness itself, what people call the hard problem of consciousness, which to my mind is the number one most important unexplained scientific problem in the world.

But all of these evolutionary psychology, Buddhism, neuroscience, computer science, all of these fields seem to me to be kind of converging, and that is exciting. I mean, you see things like the Google DeepMind algorithm is starting to do things that the engineers don't have any idea why it's doing that. I think it's called GP three or GP where Google now has computers that are writing books and painting pictures and composing music that is indistinguishable from what a human being would do, which in the field of computer science, I'm sure you're familiar with the Turing test, which is basically, can you tell the difference between a human and computer? It looks like we might be getting really close to that. But in my mind, all you're really saying is science. Different fields of science are finally catching up with some of the ideas that have been around in Buddhism for 25 years.

The idea of life is suffering DCA, which is kind of depressing when you first hear it, but then Buddhism offers a prescription for how to deal with that. It says, here's life suffering. Here's why we suffer, because we either have a craving or aversion to the idea that the self is an illusion, which is a really scary thought when you first hear it. But once you kind of experienced that, at least for me, I had very, very profound effects. And then what you were talking about earlier, the idea that there's no real essence, the emptiness, or there's no real essence to anything. Again, that sounds kind of depressing, but once you've experienced that, it has kind of a profound liberating effect, I would argue.

**Robert Wright:** I think it can have a very productive effect on human society. I mean, the example I cite in my book is on my first meditation retreat when I suddenly felt kind of transformed by meditation. And I don't want to give people the idea that these kinds of transformations you may get on a seven-day silent meditation retreat are easy to sustain. I mean, in my experience, you kind of hang on to as much as you can via regular practice. But anyway, the feeling at the retreat can be incredibly powerful. I remember I was taking a walk and I saw a weeded, a plantain weeded. If you know what kind of weeded that is, you've probably seen them. They've infested my yard in various places on the East coast, at least I'm not sure if they're common in Texas.

I just thought, why have I been trying to kill this thing when it's in my front yard? It's as beautiful as the other plants. Now, this sounds like a mundane observation because yeah, we all know weed is an arbitrary category, right? It's not like it says weed in the DNA of the plant. Some cultures deem some things weeds, and they don't like them. Some cultures might call them flowers, who knows? But it's deeper than that, you realize that the designation of weeded had been giving you a kind of subtle feeling when you see the thing that infuses your perception in a way that you barely notice. But once the feeling drops out and the thing seems beautiful, you realize how powerful that element of feeling was.

And I think the idea with essence is that much more than we know given certain things, when we look at things more than we realize, they give us a little bit of a feeling that shapes the perception and the idea. Where this gets really problematic is in human affairs when it's like essence of enemy, essence of rival. That starts distorting your perception in a way that leads to more trouble including wars, than was absolutely necessary. So, yeah, that's emptiness. It's not the idea that, oh, you don't imagine people being inspired by the observation that, hey, everything is in some sense empty. It sounds depressing, but it's really kind of the opposite, both in terms of the feeling it gives you, which is the feeling and beauty, and in terms of the possible implications of us all becoming less inclined to attribute these essences to things in certain kinds of contexts.

**Brian Beckcom:** Two examples I can think of, Bob, are the idea of memento Mori or contemplating meditating on your death. Again, that sounds terrible, but my experience has been the complete opposite. It gives you a profound appreciation for the fact that you're a conscious agent. I mean, that in and of itself is inexplicably miraculous. Then the other example you're talking about is where you perceive things and have already kind of colored your perception before you even realize it. What's helped me a lot with that as it relates to other human beings is meta meditation, which sounds goofy as hell, but basically, you sit there and wish people well, and I do one where I picture my daughter, and then I picture somebody neutral, and then I try to picture the people in the world I hate the most and wish them well. And it's hard at first, but what I've found is, boy, do you feel a lot better when you tamp down those conditioned responses you have.

**Robert Wright:** It is hard. I continue to find meta-meditation hard. Meta, by the way, is a word that means loving kindness in poly, it's M-E-T-T-A. I know you know that, but for the benefit of others. But even garden variety, mindfulness meditation, I sometimes find that it allows me to think of people I don't like more charitably. I'm not even trying to do meta-meditation if I just get into a state of greater calm. It helps with that and helps even understand the point of view of someone who's point of view you might have previously been very reluctant to acknowledge.

## The Illusion of The Self

**Brian Beckcom:** Let's talk just a little bit about the illusion of the self, because I have a question that I really want to know the answer to. I don't know if you've written about this or not, but there's essentially a forbidden instruction in the field of Buddhism, and it is what we're about to talk about. I always wondered why this was forbidden. I had a good explanation a couple of months ago, which was basically sometimes when people hear what we're about to talk about, the idea in Buddhism is if

they have that attitude, then they'll never be able to see it. But the illusion of the self is, again, one of these things that sounds kind of negative, but I've had some experiences in meditation where I try to look at the looker or perceive the perceiver or turn attention back on itself. And when I first started doing this, **Bob**, there was nothing there. I mean, there was nothing to see. I was like, is that it? I mean, there's nothing to find. But then the longer you meditate on that, you realize how profound that is. So my question for you, **Bob**, is I'm sure you've had plenty of no-self experiences.

The question I have for you, and this is something I'm currently trying not to think too hard about, but just meditate on, is once the thinking self has kind of dropped away, then we're just left with awareness. What is that awareness? If it's not the thinking self, what is it?

**Robert Wright:** It's a good question. When I alluded to incremental progress toward not self, I was thinking if you observe your anxiety, say through meditation, and suddenly it just seems like not part of you, it's like you're observing say, a column. It might feel like you might visualize it within your abdomen, but it's like you're looking at it the way you might look at a piece of abstract sculpture. It's like interesting. But it no longer has the grip on you. The same goes with thoughts sometimes, although I find it easier to observe feelings with non-attachment through meditation than I do thoughts, but still sometimes on a retreat, these thoughts are things that just kind of float by and you start seeing them kind of emerge like, whoa, where did that come from? I mean, normally you think a thought and you think, I thought that thought.

I am the thinker of thoughts. That's what the self is, right? It issues these ideas and commands, and you're on retreat, and the thought just kind of showed up, came from somewhere. If I don't get too attached to it, it will just pass away. It's like a cloud floating by. In a way, the question you're asking is, well, first of all, if you do enough of that, it's more and more like, well if the things I had thought constitute the self, my thoughts, my feelings no longer seem like part of me, and if generating them was one of the functions I assigned to the self, and it no longer seems like I'm generating them, well then where is the self? And I think that's what I meant by incremental progress toward not self. And the question that I think you're asking arises right away, well, what is that doing? The observing, I don't know. I mean, it gets back to the mystery of consciousness.

**Brian Beckcom:** Have you ever looked into panpsychism or studied any panpsychism? It's basically the idea that consciousness is kind of a universal feature of the universe.

**Robert Wright:** There's some degree of consciousness, however simple in all of the physical world embedded in it. Then when these physical things assume certain complex configurations like ours, the consciousness gets complex and there are thoughts and things. But yeah, panpsychism is undergoing a little bit of a resurgence, I think, in philosophy, but I think the fundamental problem is, as you suggested, we're just going to have a lot of trouble ever getting to the bottom of the consciousness question. I think the mind-body problem.

**Brian Beckcom:** There's people that will never answer the hard problem question.

**Robert Wright:** It could be that there's just something about the metaphysics of being embedded in the system that prevents you from understanding certain aspects of the system.



**Brian Beckcom:** I'm not saying I believe that to be true or not, but I certainly understand, and to me, that's something we're thinking about. Maybe it's just a fact of nature that our brains just aren't equipped. Being inside the system to contemplate the system itself or to see the system clearly.

**Robert Wright:** A. We're inside the system. B. As I suggested, our brains were designed by natural selection to do something quite other than perceive the ultimate truth. They weren't even designed to always perceive the local mundane truth.

## Profound Psychedelic Experiences

**Brian Beckcom:** Have you been keeping up with the latest renaissance in psychedelic research and psychedelic theory? Because one of the things that really fascinates me about some of the research that's coming out is how many of the people who undergo profound psychedelic experiences see and experience similar things, and how many of these people, including people who would've characterized themselves as atheists beforehand, have profound spiritual experiences. Have you thought about that as it relates to the study of consciousness? Because to me, these, I think it was Alan Watts who said psychedelics is like a micro soap for the mind. You use it to peer into the mind, but you're not going to sit there and stare at the micro soap for the rest of your life. It's a tool, in other words, to study consciousness. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Robert Wright:** No. There is a lot more clinical study of that. Like at Johns Hopkins and other places. There's the book by Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*.

An important cultural milestone in terms of just making psychedelics kind of mainstream, legit in a certain sense. I mean, I don't think you want to take a casual approach to them. They're very powerful, but the idea that they have the potential to facilitate philosophical and spiritual exploration, I think is much more common now, partly as a result of that book. People can Google it. It's on YouTube. I mean the brain is having knobs kind of the perception of the world is something that in principle could be fine-tuned. As William James noted the psychologist ago, the ordinary human consciousness is just one of many possible consciousnesses, and lots of chemicals that you put in the brain are going to turn various knobs up and down. First of all, in terms of level of energy and so on and so on. Also, things like the sense of truth are right. It's like some drugs just make you think whatever you're thinking at the time is true. There are a lot of variables. Then afterward you may go, well, actually I was just high.

**Robert Wright:** Some drugs. Exactly. Some drugs make you think coincidences are more significant than they might seem otherwise, right? Whoa, can you believe these two things happen and then the next day you're like, yeah, I can believe those two things. So I don't think we should assume we should attribute necessarily kind of vertical properties to these various drugs and that there's something magic about psychedelics that always show you the truth. I think sometimes they lead to delusions, but at the same time, if what I've said earlier is true that the brain is not to begin with designed to see the truth and is not designed to think about certain questions much at all, it could well be that any given chemical turns a knob in a way that moves you closer to the truth. I think we should be open to that possibility as well.

# The Modularity of the Mind

**Brian Beckcom:** You also talked about why Buddhism is true something that I think as a longtime meditator I've started to really pay attention to. That's this concept of the modularity of the mind. I don't know if you ever saw the Pixar movie "Inside Out", have you seen that movie?

**Robert Wright:** I have seen that movie.

**Brian Beckcom:** That is a great pop culture illustration of the modularity of your mind. And basically for people that aren't familiar with this concept, it's the idea that your mind, different parts of your mind does different things basically. Right?

**Robert Wright:** Which is a big theme in evolutionary psychology. One of the advisors on that film was a psychologist who's evolutionarily inclined, at least Dacher Keltner at Berkeley. In my book, my Buddhism book, I talk about the idea of the modular mind. There are these different kinds of agents in the mind sometimes working at odds with one another. If you've ever been at a cocktail party and it's like you're talking to someone, you're kind of interested in what they're saying, on the other hand you see the buffet and you're kind of hungry. It's like you can actually feel the struggle between the part of your mind that wants you to be nice to people, maybe, especially if it's an important person and the idea of your brain that just wants to keep you nourished. The idea of modularity is that there are a lot of little kinds of agents like this. They compete at a subterranean level for control of consciousness sometimes. That I argue is consistent with certain kinds of Buddhist ideas about not self and so on.

## Evolutionary Psychology and The Political Climate

**Brian Beckcom:** I want to bring this home for people. Politics is absolutely insane right now, no matter what you believe. It's been a rough time with the pandemic, a rough time with some racial unrest and stuff like this. So what I'd like to do in our final remaining minutes, Bob, is I want to talk about your newsletter, which I think is an essential read for anybody interested in any of these topics. But as I read your newsletter, you're basically making an effort to gently slap people on the head and say, we need to wake up. We need to stop heading the direction we're heading. We need to get rid of all this tribalism to the extent we can and go on a different path. So let's tie the discussion we've had about the way your mind works, evolutionary psychology, into our current political climate, and what your views are on how we work our way through this time period.

**Robert Wright:** First of all, thanks for plugging the newsletter. People can subscribe for free at [nonzerofoundation.org](http://nonzerofoundation.org). It's been in kind of a hiatus for a few weeks, but we're about to start putting it out with more frequency within a few weeks. I think much greater frequency probably after the election. The context, I like to think of it all in of the tribalism and everything is humankind through cultural evolution. We have been approaching for many, many millennia this point of globalization where I think in principle we could form a cohesive global community and quit doing things like having wars and get more serious about solving common problems.

I think if we fail, technology has already brought things that could more or less destroy the species. I think it will bring more threats of that magnitude. Things could work out very badly if we can't get our act together. First of all, the political divide within America, the ideological divide represents different views of how to engage with the world. I don't want to really belittle either the ideology of either tribe completely. I think there are valid concerns that motivate both. I mean, I'm, as you might've gathered, not a Trump supporter. Then secondly, there's the problem that the kind of tribalism we're seeing at the national level, the psychology of tribalism, to the extent that that plays out globally, that will spell doom. I mean if people of the world can't demonize each other to the extent that Americans have been demonizing each other, and I think both sides do it, that will spell doom. That's the context of my concern with our all getting, first of all, more appreciative of how subtly biased our perceptions are. Just don't assume that everyone in your tribe is right and everyone in the other tribe is wrong. And certainly don't assume that the representative of the other tribe you're seeing on social media is typical. It's the opposite. What you're seeing is the worst example of behavior on the other. That's what social media brings you every day, for sure. The worst example of a person in the other tribe.

## Social Media is Warping Democracy

**Brian Beckcom:** Can I interject something here, Bob, because I've been thinking about this for the past couple of months? Do you ever think about how insane it is that we have one person who's a Harvard dropout dictate what news, billions of people, I mean, the fact that we're letting a sexually repressed college dropout decide what a billion people,

**Robert Wright:** Zuckerberg

**Brian Beckcom:** Or even Dorsey decide.

**Robert Wright:** Maybe you know more about his marital life.

**Brian Beckcom:** Well, he started Facebook so he could get chicks at Harvard. That's the bottom line. That's why he started Facebook.

**Robert Wright:** I mean then again, according to evolutionary psychology, we all do a lot of things too.

**Brian Beckcom:** Isn't it bizarre that we've given the keys to the information that people see to four or five people in Silicon Valley and just said, you guys decide. You girls decide. I mean, that's bizarre.

**Robert Wright:** Well, how reluctant we are to exercise any intervention is bizarre to me. There's one easy thing we should obviously do with all social media, which is force these companies to be transparent about the algorithms that are governing us. We need to see all the code, and the government has the power to tell them to do it. Now, you and I, if we're confronted with that code, we won't know what the hell it means. But what will happen if they have to make it public is that you'll see companies, and you would also want to legislate some other things to make sure this happens. But you would see companies that would spring up and not just interpret the algorithm for you, but

turn it into an interface that lets you fine-tune your experience on Facebook more than you can now just slide the thing over and say, I want to see less stuff that makes me angry.

I want to see less stuff that X, Y, and Z companies would be very creative about how they did this. I'm not sure it would work, but it couldn't be worse than what we have. There are also things, I'd also be fine with breaking some of these companies up, making Facebook divest itself of Instagram, for example, because concentrations of power in the industry are so important I think are dangerous. It's problematic, but it's not so much that I think Zuckerberg is a uniquely sinister figure. He just wants to make as much money as possible. It turns out that the way to do that is to just give the most reactive parts of human nature free reign. And that's the problem. So it's actually quite a challenging problem. It would be even worse if he were this nefarious figure who wanted to use his power to do some particular nefarious thing, but he's just trying to make money, and that itself leads to trouble.

**Brian Beckcom:** I worry a little bit, Bob, as a lifelong technologist that we will get to the point if we're not careful where we won't be able to change anything because the news we'll see from the social media companies will totally and completely warp democracy. The other thing that I would maybe propose to you is all these social media companies are just profiting off your data and your metadata and they're selling your data, and you get nothing out of it. If they had to pay us for using our data, they would probably be much more responsible and frugal in the way they spread our data all over the place.

**Robert Wright:** Yeah, this is a hobby horse of Jar. Lanier is the guy who came up with the term virtual reality several decades ago and that we should be compensated for being the product. I'd be fine with that.

**Brian Beckcom:** How do we get through this? What's the solution?

**Robert Wright:** I think there are various angles you could approach it from. I do think Buddhism is one, and I think it'll be more mindfulness meditation is one as informed by Buddhist philosophy, but I think that'll be more effective if people realize it's not incompatible with any other spiritual tradition. That's right. You could be a Christian who does mindfulness meditation, a Jew or Muslim or anything else, or an atheist or an agnostic.

**Brian Beckcom:** The Dalai Lama I think said, if you're a Christian, be the best Christian you can be, still meditate, but you can be a great Christian and meditate.

**Robert Wright:** Use Buddhism to be the best whatever you already are. And I think just trying to convey to people, I think it's good that there's much more discussion of cognitive biases than there was 20 years ago. I still think it's hard to get people to really appreciate how pervasively influenced they are by the biases and try to do something about it. But I'm trying to figure it out myself and exactly how to most effectively sermonize about it. It is a big challenge. As you know, it's a dimension of the newsletter that I'm going to try to preserve. And it's a big challenge, but it's a good sign that people like you recognize it and you're interested in it and you're talking about it. I think awareness is growing.

I mean, the good news about the social media thing is, well, this is the bad news and the good news. Bad news is things are changing so fast technologically that it's kind of hard to keep up. The good news is we haven't had much time to react to the social media transformation. We haven't had time to think it through process it. I think there's reason to hope we'll figure it out to some extent and come up with whether it's a combination, probably need to be a combination, legal reforms, and even what you could call spiritual progress and just cultural progress. Just people becoming more aware of certain pitfalls and encouraging one another to avoid them.

**Brian Beckcom:** Let me ask you this hypothetical. If let's say Bob Wright hosted a group of people that were plotting some sort of terrorist act on the United States, let's say you let them hang out in your living room every night for three weeks and make the planning and you either knew or you could have known that that's what they were doing and they go out and commit some sort of criminal act. How is that any different from Facebook or any other social media group hosting some of these violent extremist groups, whether it be on the left or the right, knowingly hosting them, letting them use these platforms to plot criminal acts, and then having absolutely zero responsibility for hosting these violent extremists? Where is my analogy or where does that analogy break down? Or is that a good analogy?

**Robert Wright:** I like to think it was a better analogy two years ago than now. They purport to be more aware of the problem, and I think they're exerting a stronger hand, on YouTube, Facebook, and so on. There are perils in the other direction. This is one reason I think breaking these things up is important. I mean, the fewer people you have controlling these, the more alarming it is; they're going to decide who should be on the platform and who shouldn't.

**Brian Beckcom:** I'm so glad you brought that up because one thing that has been very irritating to me is you see this conversation about cancel culture, and you're exactly right, allowing these social media companies to dictate who can and cannot talk on their platform. There could be bad things both directions, but here's what I want to ask. All these folks like Sam Harris and all these people that just can't stop talking about this, what do you want us to do about it? I mean, they're afraid to say what I think is the obvious conclusion, there needs to be some that we need to treat these social media companies as quasi-public utilities. Because you can't say, oh, they're private companies. And so they get to choose who they want to have on their platform. Why won't people just come out and say it directly? Let's regulate these companies like quasi-public utilities.

**Robert Wright:** Well, I certainly think the case for regulation is strong. I mean, again, if the regulation consists of the government telling them who can be on the platform and who can't, that also raises concerns of a directly First Amendment kind of nature. But if antitrust law does not permit us to intervene when a very small number of companies are controlling our brains and obviously doing a bad job of it, then antitrust law needs to change.

**Brian Beckcom:** For sure. Well, it needs to be reimagined for sure.

**Robert Wright:** It's not that complicated. Certain aspects of antitrust law are completely antiquated. They should not be constraining us in the way that they are.



**Brian Beckcom:** Well, Bob, this has been an absolutely intellectual feast for me. I can't say how much I appreciate your time. I can't say how much I appreciate your work. You're just doing great things. Give us the idea behind this podcast. When I started, I got so sick of seeing all these people fighting and arguing and bitching and all the negativity and all that sort of thing. So I was like, I'm going to try to the extent I can to get some positive ideas and positive leadership out in the world. So leave us, if you don't mind, as kind of a parting thought with your most optimistic view of what the future looks like.

**Robert Wright:** The most optimistic view is at a political level. The nations come together to do more of the international governance it needs to do to address not just the obvious problems like climate change, but arms control challenges, including not just nuclear weapons but weapons in space, bioweapons, cyber weapons, all kinds of things come together to ensure that nations don't start engaging in some kind of human engineering arms race, like the various things. And at the same time, we don't let the world become characterized by massive disparities in well-being and economic wherewithal. I think part of that optimistic picture has to be, I don't think it can happen without some degree of enlightenment. I don't just mean some kind of commitment to reason and say I believe in reason and I'm discarding primitive beliefs, and I look down on religious people.

That's the thing. The new atheists are as susceptible as anyone else to the subtly corrupting biases of perception and cognition that keep us all from enlightenment in the true sense. And so I think there will have to be progress whether you call it psychological. I think in some ways it might qualify as spiritual, but I think at something of a grassroots level, there's going to have to be progress. That is its moral progress and progress in self-awareness and progress informed by the stakes, by what's at stake here, and the importance of us all trying to become better people in these senses. That's the optimistic scenario. It is optimistic at the political level and a personal psychological slash spiritual level. I think it can happen, but it's going to take a lot of work. We're not ahead right now.

**Brian Beckcom:** The new atheist. You brought them up a number of times, and I agree with you a hundred percent. One of the problems I see with that group of folks is when you take something away from somebody so important as their religion, you have to leave them with something in its place. I don't see that they're offering very good prescriptions as far as that goes.

**Robert Wright:** Well, Sam Harris is into meditation, I just think he's wrong to think that religion is a problem. I just think that's flat-out wrong. I debated him in LA. I said to Sam, 'if you think that the way to solve the terrorism problem is for you to look at Muslims and say you don't understand, your God doesn't even exist. If you think that's going to make things better, you're on drugs'

**Brian Beckcom:** Or have Dawkins just make fun of everybody constantly. That's not going to get us anywhere. Well, Bob, this has been really fun for me, and I appreciate it. We could talk forever about these topics. Thank you for your time.

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## About the Author

[Brian Beckcom](#) is one of the nation's top trial lawyers. He is also a widely published author, including multiple books and hundreds of articles. Brian's interests include technology, consciousness, meditation, physics, mathematics, history, narrative, memetic theory, leadership, persuasion, quantum gravitation, computer science, and more. Lessons from Leaders podcast features national leaders, including military officers, national business experts, judges, spiritual leaders, and other guests who have shown leadership during difficult times.