

>> Welcome to the podcast series of Raising the Bar Sydney. Raising the bar in 2019, so 21 University of Sydney academics take their research out of the lecture theatre and into bars across Sydney, all on one night. In this podcast, you'll hear Alexander Lafedge [phonetic] talk, Where do Your Values Come From. Enjoy the talk. [applause]

>> Hi everyone. Thanks for coming. Can you hear me in the back? Yeah, you're good. Okay. So, thanks everyone for coming. I want to start tonight with a short story of my first Aussie Christmas. So, I came here in 2010 with my wife and my small child, and for the first few years we kept on going back to Canada to celebrate Christmas with family, but in 2016, we stayed put, and we were looking forward to Aussie Christmas. Now, I like in Coogee. I was ready to get my barbecue on. I put on my flip flops. I won't call them thongs because that's means something totally different where I'm from, and I headed down to the beach. Now, does anyone remember 2016 Coogee Beach? I don't know if you were there, but there was something going on there, and it was as the kids say, off the hook. So there's this party, and this is the party that was so big and so loud and so trashy in the lateral sense that it led to the enduring liquor ban at Coogee still till today, and a few days later the party made the cover of the New York Times for its wildness and its excess. Now, I'm on the a prudish guy, I don't think, and this wasn't my first time seeing a bikini or having a beer, but this just really took me back, and I guess it was the contrast of Christmas and the solemnity, and so, I paddled out in the water, got some distance, watched the human spectacle, and I thought to myself, holy crap, this is the most godless city I've ever lived in. And by godless, I don't mean it's wicked or depraved or immoral or anything like that. I mean something that it's like God absent, that for so many people in our world, in my Sydney, in my world today, I think navigate the world and enjoy a, I mean you guys are good people. Outside the Sydney property market, people are nice and kind, and people live fulfilled lives. There's no, I don't feel existential angst, but God is and organised religion isn't really the framework for that. So, the way I want to lead into tonight is, let's warm up with a question. So, let's say we beamed in the next Census, it's 2026 isn't that Census, but let's say you had it right now in front of you, and you come to the religion question, and there's all these boxes you can tick, right. There's several versions of Christianity, then there's all the historical religions, and at the very bottom, there is the no religion box, and in 2006, that bock was ticked by 15 percent of Aussies. In 2016, it was ticked by 30 percent, so double. Now, I mean who knows what it's going to be next round, but who in this bar would tick that no religion box? Yeah, my wife said, what if no one puts up their hand, and I said, this is a [inaudible]. And so, my question to all of you, but especially to you no religion types, is where do you get your values? And this was the, if you remember the blurb or the little mini writeup that I did for this talk is hopefully what brought you here, and the question I raised was, the thing I set out was something like this, 100 years ago, you could have asked anyone in the world, rich, poor, western, nonwestern, where they get their values from, and they would have been able quickly, instinctively, intuitively to point

to something, like a bang, and there would have been something at the end of that point, something big, something civilizational size. Most people, of course, would have pointed to an organised religion, some people would have pointed to a longstanding custom or something like that. The few sweet souls might have named a philosopher, but everyone had something. I have sense now today that question would stump a lot of people, and if you were asked point blank where you get your values from, you kind of wallop and say, you know, my family, my experiences, but that's not the kind of size or structure that I'm talking about. What institutional orders do you acquire it from, and that's the question I want to pursue tonight, and in particular, I want to lay out, I hope, something of a provocative these, and let me go in its maximal form. I think I can see all of your souls, and I think that all of your souls, not all of your souls, let's say of the no religion souls, those souls, I want to say, are liberal down to their bones and that your soul is constitutively taking its values and its sensibility from something called liberalism, and that's the idea I want to present and, so yeah, so that's the plan. And I don't just mean like your political values or how you behave as a citizen. I mean you, all the way down to your sense of humour, to your sense of intimacy, to your sense of what you find outrageous or offensive, the whole package of what makes you you is in large part indebted to this thing called liberalism. So, the game plan for my talk tonight is, one, say what liberalism is, and I'm going to keep this to like three sips of bear short because attention is going to flag, so I'm going to keep it brief, but we still needs some sort of basis in common to talk. Two, I want to suggest how far this thing called liberalism reaches down into our everyday lives, here and now, you and me, and in so doing, I want to try to hold up a mirror to all of us, and I want to see if, forgive me, if you're vibing with me, if you're in tune with what I'm saying, and if you can see yourself in the portrait that I'm painting. Call it self-knowledge, but I think that it's something that ought to be recognised perhaps a bit more than it is today. Then I want to suggest why living a liberal life is, first, hard and b, hopefully rewarding, and then the last thing I want to do is sit back and enjoy the question period and the blowback that I'm going to get during it. Okay, what are the stakes, why am I talking about this? So, first of all, as we all know, liberalism is under attack everywhere in the world right now from Brazil to America, from Britain to the Philippines. It's in retreat, and it's on its back foot. And the global conversation about liberalism and the dangers to it right now is really centred on the threats to an institutional order, and those threats are really important and really scary, so we stand to lose things like potentially the idea of individual rights, the idea of human rights, the idea of a division of powers, of judicial neutrality of rule of law, wow that is important stuff. But what I want to try to focus your attention on is a different order of loss that we might suffer and that loss is something like if I'm right and if our values are indeed entrenched in this thing called liberalism, then we're not just losing a liberal order if liberalism is pushed back, we're losing something like a source of the self, or a key mainstay of our identity, and a liberal is often defined as someone who won't stand up even in defence of their own cause, well kind of like, fuck that, why? Why would we do that, and so what I want to try to

create is this sort of sense of what we might lose and passion for it, first thing. Second thing is, is I want to give a better defence of liberalism than is currently on the market right now. This is a bar talk, so I can speak frankly, I think liberals suck at defending themselves. I think that they constantly go negative, and the whole conversation is about how awful the challengers are on offer right now. So, how nasty populism is, how parochial nativism is, how limited and dangerous authoritarianism is. And I don't know if you guys watched the democratic primary just now, but it was all, it was like 80 percent on Trump, and I'm sitting there pulling out my metaphorical hair saying what the hell, go positive, and no one is doing it, and slogans like stop the boats or build the wall or 350 million pounds a year. Now, that's something, and electorally something will always be nothing. And to quote or to paraphrase the big Lebowitz, say what you like about the ethos of populism, dude, no say what you like about the tenets of populism, dude, at least it's an ethos. Sorry, [inaudible] big Lebowitz. And so, what I want to do tonight is present, defend, sell if you like liberalism as an ethos. Make sense? We're good? All right. So, first thing, clear up an immediate potential misunderstanding, by liberalism I'm not talking about the liberal party of Australia. I'm not talking about the labour party of Australia either. I'm talking about something bigger that in a sense encompasses both of them. I think both of our major political parties in this country are liberal. Thank God for mandatory voting. It isn't such a good institution because it keeps things there. But what I'm talking about with liberalism is this 200-year-old tradition that started in Western Europe but that has since spread to form the foundation of advanced or mature democracies around the world. Now, the question of what liberalism is a minefield of complexities. There's all of these different nuances and I don't want to lose the forest for the trees. And so, what I want to do is put all that to the side and just give you sort of the big picture 101 of liberalism, again bear with me five minutes. The talk is going to get more engaging momentarily. Okay, so I want to paint with a big, broad stroke. The question I want to ask is what's the point of a liberal society? Now, every human society historically has always had and seen itself as having some kind of point. Now, more than above of like protecting people or feeding people or enjoying each other's company, there's always something extra that they are bringing and that kind of orients their self-understanding. So, if we were to hop in a time machine and go ask some ancient Greeks what they thought the purpose of their civilisation was, he, and definitely a he in this case, he would answer the production of the highest forms of human excellence. And if it takes a slave class to do it, well fine, we can live with that. Jump in the time machine again, go to Christianity. What's the point of society? Salvation, to bring about the kingdom of God in the future and in the meantime save souls. And societies can have completely bonkers and morally abhorrent purposes as well. So, what's the purpose of Nazism? The master race. The purpose of ISIS? The caliphate. My point is is that societies always have a point, and liberal society, liberal societies that we live in, I don't think are exempt from that. I mean it's not going to be a capital P transcendental purpose in that way, but there's going to be something, and if I had to propose what the purpose of liberal society would

be, it would be this. Write this down in your notes, I would tell my students. The point of a liberal society is to be a–

[ Inaudible Comment ]

What was that?

[ Inaudible Comments ]

All right. I was warned this would happen. The point of a liberal society is to be a fair system of cooperation so that its members have a chance to flourish. One more time with feeling, the point of a liberal society is to be a fair system of cooperation so that all of its members have a chance to flourish. Now, that sounds technical, sure, but you Aussies with your genius for nickname and abbreviation have given this a three-word catch phrase that is absolutely picture perfect. Liberal society is a fair go. That's what it means at the end of the day. And in that phrase a fair go, you encapsulate the two main historical moments of liberalism. On the one hand, the development of the doctrine of equal rights so that we have freedom to do stuff against the king, against democratic majorities, we get to be free, and more pointedly in the Aussie case is this idea of a quality of opportunity. That's what a fair go is all about so that rich or poor there's a semi, in principle, level playing field so that people can make use and actualize their freedom and their rights. And so, I want to make this Australian's gift to the political vernacular, because if you look up fair go on Google, it's still an Australian term. There's no way, it's bigger than this place. It's great. So, just to sum up, and then we get to the good stuff. Three big take-home values about liberalism. One, liberals believe in personal freedom in the sense that everyone should be able to live the kind of life they want. Two, freedom. Two, fairness. Liberals believe in the idea of a fair go. Three, pluralism. Liberals don't, liberals at least claim not to dictate what the good life is, and so in that sense it actively fosters pluralism in so far as each and every individual is said to go forth and discover it and live it and be it. So, the three big values of liberalism, freedom, fairness, pluralism. Okay. You might be looking at your drink right now and say, thank you, associate professor obvious, I know all this stuff. I don't know why I came to this talk. But here's where I want to make my move and where I think things get more interesting. So, academics and journalists typically talk about liberalism as something strictly institutional, as has been mentioned, or like in terms of citizenship. Like it's this political thing. It's over there and it's important, but it's over there. But what I'm trying to say is that liberalism is so much more than that. It's a whole system of values and of moral orientation–

>> You're listening to Raising the Bar Sydney 2019.

>> Conservative critics are in fact much closer to the mark insofar as they appreciate the liberalism can be this full-blown system of values, but they tend to see that as something destructive, something that's mowing down everything good and real in their world. So, I don't know, I don't know if you follow the Twitter, but Bill Barr, the attorney general of the United States spoke at Notre

Dame two days ago, was that yesterday? And he had a hissy fit, not hissy, he had a polemic against liberalism, and here's what he says, I quote, it's very short, don't worry. So, and this is a Catholic university spoken by a Catholic, not turned Catholic, but that's just the deal, "Liberalism is organised destruction. Secularists and their allies have marshalled all the forces of mass communication in popular culture, the entertainment industry, and academia in an unremitting assault on religion and traditional values." Now, minus everything about that quote, that quote is exactly what I'm saying, which is this, that liberalism got its start 200 years ago, and it's been developing ever since. In the first moment of its birth, it was indeed a political thing, and moreover, liberalism didn't invent its own value. It's not like one day a liberal scratched his head and said, oh, yeah, personal freedom, that is a priority. No, of course liberalism evolves like anything else out of antecedent traditions, and in my own particular reading, I think it evolves out of reform Christianity. But over 200 years, that's a long period of time, and over 200 years, the main idea of these political things of liberalism start to spread and grow and disseminate into every aspect of our lives and to every value sphere and to all of a sudden it becomes not just this political doctrine but a ubiquity. It becomes a background culture that we all live, breathe, and navigate to understand ourselves and to understand other people. And so this is what I am trying to get at in this talk. What I'm trying to say again, just to come back to my pitch, is that liberalism is us. It's in our most private, most personal, and most everyday selves, and for better or worse, we are liberals, many of us are liberals in our souls. So, let me give you some examples. This might sound abstract. It might sound stipulative, I'm sure it does. But let me give you some examples of how I think we're all liberal in our souls and how it's informing our sensibility. So, the most clearest one in my research so far, and one that's kind of fun in a sense, is swear words and the history of swear words. Has anyone looked into this topic? It's such a fascinating way to look at things, because when you study the history of swear words, what you're getting is an acute vision into what a culture finds taboo, awful, wrong, sacrilegious, whatever, and on the other hand, negatively as it were, you get to see what that culture thinks is right. And so I'm reading this tremendous, terrific book right now by an author named Melissa Moore, and the book is called Holy Shit, and the title is terrific because in that title what she is doing is encapsulating 3000 years of swear words. Those two words wax and wane at different historical moments, but they have dominated our understanding of the obscene. So, take the shit words, which cover the excremental and the sexual. Those words were the bad words as it were of certain historic, she looks at western civilisation, so I'm going to go with that, so those words were the very bad words say of Roman civilisation and then again in Victorian civilisation and sort of in our 20th Century. We don't have time for this, but it's interesting. So, the worst insult that you could possibly say to a Roman was to insult a man as a passive sexual partner. It didn't matter who he was doing it with. It didn't matter if it was a boy, a man, a woman. It's just you had to be the giver, the doer, the thruster, otherwise, the whole natural order of virility and vir in Latin means man, is under siege. So, anyways, you get this picture

as to what a civilisation is up to. But on the other hand, you got your shit words. On the other hand, you have your holy words, and your holy words are of course those that are sacrilegious, and in different times, these rise to the forefront of the words that are truly bad and dangerous. And so, in this case you have Judaism. You also have the Christian Middle Ages in which the big worries in both those cultures were idolatry on the one hand and false odes on the other hand, and false odes, especially, were really, really dangerous because you were calling upon God to witness and to back your lie, and that threatened the divine order. It was literally thought to hurt the body of Christ in heaven, and it hurt the secular world, because it tore it apart. Anyways, fascinating topic, this history of swear words business. Now, in a sense, we might think here and now that we're post swear words, right. Like I lecture at Sydney Uni, and I've let an F-bomb drop once or twice in lecture. It happens. But no one in my experience or my knowledge has raised an eyebrow or has complained or even been like, it's just nothing, it just doesn't register. And so, in a sense we might think that we are post swear words, but I think that is deeply wrong. I think our category of swear words has changed and that we still have them, they're just all together a different kind or category. So, if I were, forgive me, to go up in my lecture and say words like cunt or nigger or faggot or words of that magnitude, I would be represented within a week and rightly fired. Now, what do those words have in common? Well, they're terms of personal attack from one human being to another. They are terms that demean another person. They're terms that humiliate them, and they are terms that undercut at their most violent the basis of self-respect of other people. And all of those attacks, what makes them such a travesty for us, what do they have in common, they're all violations of our highest order liberal principles. They violate the notions of tolerance. They undercut the possibility of freedom, and they scotch the very idea of fairness, because if someone grows up with internalisation of themselves as x, y, or zed, there's not much that, the deck is stacked against them in every possible cyclical and social way. So, my point is, okay, so why am I talking about this? My point is is that, okay, so liberalism is political, yeah, okay. What I'm trying to say that no, maybe not, maybe it's something visceral, something that we feel at our deepest level of intuitive sensibility and something like swear words discloses that. It's the way in which we access something much wider in a sense about ourselves. That's my, okay, so exhibit A of our liberal soul, swear words and how they've changed and what kind of swear words we have today. Exhibit B of our swear words, no, exhibit B of our liberal souls, I want to take not from the category of the offended, but a category of being outraged. Now, I am a pretty kind of, I think I'm, liberal, pretty chill guy. I mean nothing really phases me and especially nothing really shocks me. The world disappoints me but seldom shocks, and this year though I was genuinely shocked to my core to speak dramatically, but I was legitimately shocked, and this was when, and it's a clip that I guess you've all seen before, this was when Vladimir Putin high-fived the crown prince of Saudi Arabia in the G20 summit. Do you remember that? This was after the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, the reporter for the Washington Post. Do you guys know what I'm talking about? Yeah, okay, yeah. And so,

I don't know if you were with me, but I was shocked at that, and I started to reflect. I'm not a shocked guy. How did this happen? And it wasn't, I don't, I mean speak for myself, and you can see if you share these intuitions, it wasn't the murder or the horrific dismemberment of the victim of [inaudible] that shocked me. I mean despots will be despots, and this is a historical, tragic fact, but what shocked me was the celebration of this fact in open air, and why does that shock me? Because again, it violates one of those major tenets of liberal culture. One thing that the liberal hates more than anything else, and I'm happy to go into this history deeper, is public cruelty. Liberals hate cruelty. They do it all the time, don't worry, we're not post-cruel, but it's absolutely not okay, public cruelty is not okay in the sense of intimidating, deliberately inflicting pain and violence to intimidate and strike fear in other people. That's one of those things that cuts to the very heart of undermining our capacity for freedom. So, you have this giant push over the long history of liberalism of great thinkers saying cruelty, not okay. So, for example, you get in philosophy the thinking like Montaigne [phonetic] or Montesquieu [phonetic]. You get in art with Goya or you get it in jurisprudence with Voltaire [phonetic]. The point is is that there's this kind of like, the constant convergence of sensibility on this fact that this cruelty is not okay, and yet, here, what did we see in 2019 but the very celebration publicly affirmed with pleasure of cruelty. And that was for me a whoa dude kind of moment, and I say that with seriousness and solemnity, that shocked me. I don't know if that's shocked you. Last example, okay, so I've been sort of on the bummers here, being offended and outraged. Comedy, contemporary comedy. Now, I'm writing this book right now on liberalism as a way of life, and my main things are a philosopher, but I'm also talking a lot about comedy because contemporary comedy is like a treasure trove of a liberal sensibility, and I dare you to understand 30 seconds of any mainstream comedy that we have now without constant and continued reference to liberal ideas. So, shows like, I don't know, this is a bit old, but whatever, The Office, Parks and Rec, The Good Place, Brooklyn 99, or comedians like, or what, Stephen Colbert or comedians like Hannah Gadsby or Dave Chappelle, all of this comedy is simply playing with liberal ideas, so using them to unsettle certain points of view. Hannah Gadsby is a master of that, for example, laughing at our hypocrisy with respect to these ideas, that's Colbert all the way, or satirising our mechanical application of liberal ideas, and that's something like Chappelle. The point is is that this comedy is in a sense is exemplifying and teaching us this sensibility every time we open Netflix such that we just like swim in it. And, I mean, you don't want to get into this, but I want to write a chapter, do watch Parks and Rec? Leslie Knope, let me just say that word, Leslie Knope is the paragon of the liberal self. She's kind of towing the line between paragon and parody, or because I teach philosophy, something that comes up all the time in class that's hot right now is The Good Place. What an interesting show. We don't, we can talk about this in question if you're interested, but there is a show about the afterlife with no reference whatsoever to religion or to theological question. The whole issue of The Good Place is how to be nice, good to people in the afterlife and how to navigate the bureaucracy of angels and demons. It's a liberal world. I feel like

I'm in university. Like it's my job. And what that also, in a sense it discloses a comedic sensibility, but it also discloses a very interesting religious sensibility, and we can come back to that, what a liberalisation of our world does to our spiritual depth. I have a sense that it flattens it in very interesting ways, that we're superficial but not in a bad way, that we're horizontal. Anyways, we'll come back to that. Okay. So, I've given you a series of examples of what, of kind of examples of liberalism, and this is my idea that I want to hold it up at the mirror and say are you, do you feel me, is are we attuned. Or do you see yourself in what I am describing in terms of three kind of quotidian examples of laugh, of comedy, of offence, and of outrage. So, that's, think about that, and you can push back if you like. Now, I want to conclude with two points. Sort of a long [inaudible]. So, I want to conclude with first of all the difficulty of living liberal life. So, I really want to avoid the impression that living liberally as it were is easy, as if because we swim in this thing that it's ubiquitous and it's all around us, that all we have to do is turn on Netflix and bang, we're there. I think that's wrong, and I think that it's tremendously difficult to be genuinely liberal and to speak, or speaking, let me be more [inaudible], it's really easy to be a shitty liberal. In fact, I think it's just as easy to be, it's just as tempting to be a phoney or a fair weather liberal as it is to be a phoney or a fair weather Christian or any major religion. The temptations and the, they're always there. So, on the one hand, okay, so how can we screw up liberalism? Let me count the ways. First of all, we can corrupt any liberal value that we want and basically run with them in the opposite direction. So, freedom of speech can be taken to defend hate speech. Identity can be used today and is now used as, is weaponized for a called-out culture on the internet. Freedom of contract, freedom of property, all that stuff can motivate capitalism and neoliberalism and the soaring inequalities that we have today. So, all that's true. It's not that interesting though. I mean basically the message here is that people suck and people will ruin any good concept they get their hands on but that liberal concepts are no less vulnerable or susceptible to this fall. The other more interesting problem concerns with how difficult leading a liberal life is in the sense of how much self-transformation it requires, that these aren't kind of give me or go-to ideas, but they require substantial work and care in a sense of one's selfhood. So, let me name two examples. Tolerance. Who here is against tolerance? Nobody is against tolerance, right. Everybody loves tolerance, but there's two ways in which we can tolerate. One is a bad way, and easy or bad tolerance is easy to come by in a sense, right. In that sense, tolerance would be merely tolerating the other person, kind of hearing them out, not really taking what they say seriously, allowing their point of view, and in a sense subjecting none of your beliefs to any kind of scrutiny or reflection. So, that's easy, and we do it all, we do it dy, that's just how we navigate our world, we're human. But on the other hand, real tolerance is something tremendously demanding and has to be paired with virtues of humility, of moral humility and of intellectual humility, and genuine tolerance involves a generous scepticism towards oneself and ability to suspend one's point of view to see what the other person is saying, occupying that like, trying to get into their frame of mind to see what



motivates what they're saying, what they care about, etc., etc. And that's so hard to do, and I find it verges on impossible. So, for example, I'm trained in western philosophy, and I get really kind of ticked off, it's just that I get annoyed for the wrong reasons. When people trash western civ as if it were one thing. Western civ is not one thing. Western civ is this internal tradition that keeps on criticising and reinventing itself such that it take tremendous imaginative leaps for a modern like us to go read a Greek or to go read a Christian mediaeval. I mean the worlds are entirely different, and to do that, you have to be tolerant in that robust sense of humility. You have to suspend yourself and get in there, and if it's so hard to move within, intraculture, geez, how hard is it to move between cultures. I'm not saying it can't be done, but I'm saying the moral and intellectual maturity is tremendous to be able to understand for me Chinese artefact or Chinese work of literature or an aboriginal, etc. It, an average, I'm sorry, that's not [inaudible], an aboriginal work or an aboriginal story or what have you, that that takes kind of valleys to cross that is admirable as difficult. But that's what living tolerance in kind of its genuine sense would take. Another example, fairness. So, who [inaudible] Aussie is fair go. But fairness is so tough because we are trying to be fair in a meritocratic world. In a sense, meritocracy seems like it's all on board fairness, but we're drilling ourselves constantly and we drill our children especially if there are parents in the house in the values of meritocracy, and we think that the social and economic reward should track onto, sorry, that social and economic reward should track achievement, that you get out what you put in. And that's, from a liberal point of view, that's wrong. That's descriptively wrong, and that's morally wrong because, this sounds cheesy, but it takes a village. An accomplishment or any talent has been fostered through institutions, through systems, through education, and it takes all of that superstructure in order for any of us to flourish. So, high five to the eastern suburb student who got the 99 on their ATAR and is crushing it and is now in medical school. Like way, not facetiously, way to go. But on the other hand, a truly liberal perspective for that student and more demandingly, for the parents of that student, would be to recognise that that student's talent is a collective achievement, and moreover, it's a collective asset. It's something that that genius owes to all of us because we all brought it together, and I'm not saying we have to carry this all the time, but that's what genuine fairness would take. It rubs against our ideas of meritocracy. And it's so hard, it's so easy to depart from it because our whole notions of merit, of desert, of self-love, they're just like, no, no, it's me. I deserve it. Hold your horses. So, the problem that I'm talking about in a sense is something old as the hills. Christian theologians are genius at this, and so, Kierkegaard, for example, Soren Kierkegaard 19th Century Danish theologian, and I can see all these fans, we're all going to roast in this liberal hotbed. [laughter] And so chill, literally, we're getting there. So, Soren Kierkegaard, so he's this Copenhagen guy, Copenhagen guy, sorry. [inaudible] a Danish philosopher whose entire problem was in a sense how to be a good Christian in a world that pretends to be Christian. So, Kierkegaard hated with all his soul, not the atheist, not the Muslim, not the heretic, what Kierkegaard hated is the fair-weather, Sunday morning bourgeois who put on

his suit to go to church and who hung out and then basically lives like a moral decorous life but didn't give a second thought to Christ for the rest of the week, and that's what he hated. And so, his whole career, his life problem, his existential problem was how to be a Christian within conditions of what he calls Christendom. Now, what I'm saying is something similar, but in this talk I'm not talking about how to be a liberal in illiberal places. I'm on the talking about the brave young people or everyone in Hong Kong right now trying to stand up for recognisably [inaudible] values in a place that will not hear of them. I'm saying, that's not my problem. In talking, not my problem, I mean that's not what I'm addressing right now. What I'm addressing is how to be a liberal within liberaldom in a sense that how do we be liberal in a society that professes to be liberal, where everyone is, yeah, we're all on board, we're drinking the Kool-Aid, but it's bullshit. No one is. And no one takes these values with anything more than a notional commitment. What it takes is speak theologically, like a real or a conversional level of commitment to let these values sink in. So, final thing, why do it? Why not sit back with your Kierkegaard bourgeois? Go binge watch Netflix and just chill and assume that everything is fine. That's tempting, I mean don't get me wrong, that has its perks, but one way to get at this question is to, so I've been talking about liberalism, which is 200 years old, but I could also talk about the word liberal, which is a much, much older word. It's 2000 years old. It's a Latin word, and what that word means in its etymology, but also enduringly in English today is someone who is free and someone who is generous. And we also have that connotation in English but also with open minded. So, you can have a liberal portion, or you can have a liberal character, fine. Now, being a liberal in that sense, any time in history is tremendously difficult, and our era is not different. We have all kinds of obstacles to it. Christianity tempts us with its sirens of individualism and our joys of materialism. Our political culture right now tempts us with tribalism and whatever the opposite of humility, of vanity is. And so what you have now, I mean I'm sure you all know this, you have in the last 50 or 40 years, you have a booming self-help industry, right. And no matter how many Oprahs or Jordan Petersons or Alenda Buton [phonetic], you have out there, they're not going to be able to fill the gap or the market left by this recession of organised religion. And so, in my little academic world, everyone is turning to their favourite philosopher and saying, ooh, this guy knows or this person knows, and they're writing kind of how to live well according to Seneca, Pruis [phonetic], Ptolemy, Newton, Nicci [phonetic], whatever. Name your person. That's cool, power to them, that's awesome. If you can spin that, and I've done a book like that, so yeah, but what I'm saying is, okay fine. We can go to distant [inaudible] and we can try to reach across decades or centuries to find these models, and if they're convincing [inaudible]. But I guess what I'm saying with all this liberalism business is perhaps a model surrounds us already. Perhaps it's ready to hand and moreover perhaps it's something that we already, even if notionally accept, and that we could deepen our commitment to. So, in that sense, we don't have to cross Herman Mudick [phonetic] and interpretive meadows to get to some other place and try to figure out some other doctrine.

We're here, and that's the thought I want to leave with us tonight. Thanks.

[ Applause ]

>> Thank you for listening to the podcast series of Raising the Bar Sydney. If you want to hear more podcasts from Raising the Bar, head to [raisingthebarydney.com.au](http://raisingthebarydney.com.au).