

Steven Durlauf: Well hello everyone, and welcome to The Inequality Podcast, this is Steven Durlauf. It's both an honor and a pleasure to introduce one of the world's leading philosophers, Philip Kitcher, who is a John Dewey, Professor Emeritus at Columbia University. His book, *The Advancement of Science*, is the sort of book that links social science and philosophy of science and understanding scientific progress that is revelatory. *Vaulting Ambition* is an essential book in understanding socio-biology and its implications for how social scientists ought to model. But of course, I could go on. I think both the ethical project and moral progress once again showed this extraordinary past to think about positive phenomenon in terms of societal evolutions and the implications for ethics. There are two books that Philip has written in the last few years that are essential for thinking about inequality. And so, Philip it's great to have an opportunity to talk with you about both of them.

Philip Kitcher: Well, thank you very much, Steven. What you said is very, very kind. I wish I could live up to the introduction.

Durlauf: So I thought we could start with your recent book, *The Rich and the Poor*, which is a distillation of thinking that you develop over many years about ethics, justice. It's written in a way that is really, almost a creed of court, as social scientists and the policy makers and how to think about contemporary inequalities. And so I thought to start, I was hoping you could outline your basic thinking on the concept of the erosion of kindness.

Kitcher: Well, all of this really is a chronicle that I have lived through. I grew up in a society that was far more egalitarian, although it was morally deficient in a variety of ways. But it was far more egalitarian in terms of the opportunities offered to people who didn't have much money or whose parents didn't have much money. I grew up in Britain shortly after the Second World War ended. At that time, the Labour Government was in the business of creating public goods and creating opportunities for people who had not traditionally had them. So I grew up in a family that had never even thought of sending anybody to a university.

That became possible for me and it's a remarkable fact that that happened. When I look at the world today and I look at the two countries I know best, I see an enormous change and that change has really diminished the opportunities for people in my stratum of the economic society compared to what they were. That doesn't mean to say that the opportunities have been overall diminished. I mean, we have seen great advances since I was young in the understanding of opportunities for women and we've seen a complete revolution in ways of thinking about same-sex love. Those are the great steps forward, I think. But in economic terms, it seems to me we have gone socially backward. The people who now can, as it were, move up the ladder, have high social mobility are rather few in

many, many countries. There are still residues left of the institutions, most prominently these occur in the Scandinavian countries and perhaps in places like the Netherlands. But these are relics and sort of remainders and residues of a much richer system that spread opportunity much more widely in the past. And I see this as going along with the development of a capitalist competitive ethos.

Capitalism is, I think, a house with many mansions. This is a particular version of capitalism, which is highly competitive, highly insistent on maximizing productivity and that narrows our vision of what human life can be and explicitly divorces itself from ethical considerations. So I see the erosion of kindness really in terms of thinking hard and ethically about our fellow citizens and other people and thinking about their opportunities. Everything seems to be subordinated to making sure that a nation becomes as productive as possible. So we educate our children as if they were cogs in a productive machine that should go forward at maximal efficiency and the idea that policies might be crafted in thinking about the well-being and welfare of everyone in the state. That seems to be disappearing and that's what I mean by the erosion of kindness.

Durlauf: I think that this argument that thinking about social well-being as summarized simply by GDP, that seems to be clearly correct if you look at political currents, I'd say in the United States. It's inconceivable to me that one could imagine a government advocating the equivalent of the war on poverty today. The notion that the US would define itself by addressing both historical injustices, obviously with the Civil Rights Act being part of that, but the effort to integrate everybody into the middle class to be precise about it and fulfill the mythos of the American dream, that it's just so far from any contemporary discourse. I associate that a little bit with Ronald Reagan to be honest with you. It would seem to me that was when the seat change was in the presumption that money from taxes is wasted and not used for social goods. I think all those points are very well taken.

I wanted to ask you a bit about the arguments in terms of critiques of meritocracy. Daniel Markovitz and others have argued that one of the consequences of meritocratic ideology is justification for inequalities. It seems to be that by implication that's generated the erosion of kindness that you talk about.

Kitcher: It seems to me that this idea of turning to meritocracy in a particular way already presupposes a certain kind of equality that is actually absent. How can you say that you're assigning positions by merit when so many young people in the United States and in other countries—it's particularly evident, I think, in the United States has really quite high inequality. How can you say that you're really choosing people on merit when vast numbers of people have no serious educational opportunities at all? I mean, it's very nice to say to a young black kid in the ghetto, 'yeah, you too can be a lawyer, you too might make it to be

the CEO of a serious corporation,' when the schools that are assigned for these children are so awful. They're so deprived of resources. They're not contexts in which people can be expected to learn. Now it's certainly true. And I've had wonderful students at Columbia who've come out of context like that and have made it through, but we are missing a vast amount of talent or potential talent right from the start because of the ways in which education is distributed in the United States.

The argument is just like the argument that was given in the 19th century for giving opportunities to women, like people like John Stuart Mill. Basically, you're neglecting half of your population. And I think probably the figure is roughly the same at the moment, although it's not done on sex or gender grounds, it's being done on economic grounds. So I think the idea that we're living in a meritocracy is already infected with the awfulness of the inequalities, which we're not getting the most meritorious people out by the competition we currently have. We're running a race that has quite a lot of people lumbered with huge weights from the start.

Durlauf: And I think that those are essential arguments in understanding why the narrow conception of meritocracy that is currently [inaudible] about, in other words, the standardized test scores should be monotonically predicting who gets to go to elite schools. It's actually economically inefficient. And so this is something I've been writing on, which is that if we think about meritocracy as implicitly defined by what makes a society efficient—and efficiency can include normative considerations, such as equality of—once you think about the dynamics, you have to have a very different way to think about it, because sorting period by period by period in a certain way, each one may be in a static sense meritocratic, it's collectively grossly inefficient. And I think it's an important example where there's been bad language that came from economics about equality/efficiency trade-offs. When in fact, they're both features of a society, you choose institutions, you choose rules, and they may both improve, they may move in opposite directions. I think all of those arguments are really quite well taken.

Kitcher: Yeah. I mean I think the essential point is, as you say, that having the kinds of inequalities that we might have at the moment is economically inefficient. The lack of investment put into education is really quite phenomenal, and the huge variance in the quality of American schools. This is not just an American phenomenon. It's also manifest in many other parts of the world, but perhaps never so grotesquely as it is in the United States at the moment.

Durlauf: So I want to ask you a bit about some specific arguments that you develop in the book about what the right statistics are to think about social, economic, well-being. An argument that I took from the book, which I completely agree with, is that we have an

excess focus on averages. We look at per capita GDP, as opposed to the statistics that talk about the distribution. I think from the perspective of the way at least economists measure things, it leads to one answer, which is that we should really think about well-being as the object. I'm not saying that's an easy thing to measure, but once you have well-being, you can then have a statistic that's a social welfare function that aggregates individual well-being in a way that I think you would be able to agree, prioritize, the less advantages.

The other dimension would be asking about more normatively specific statistics, such as, how do I operationalize the notion of a equality of opportunity? And I kind of want to get your sense of the direction, my team should be going.

Kitcher: Yea I mean, this is very difficult because well-being itself is a difficult notion to understand. My own approach to this is in terms of capabilities, which we might think of as a fancy name for opportunities. What I think we should be looking at is not only the average opportunities or the average opportunity spectrum available to a person in a particular country—say the United States or Britain or Germany or Japan or any other country that we focus on—should not just look at that. We should also look at the distribution of the spectrum of opportunities. It would be very interesting to see if you could mathematize that in such a way that you could produce the same kind of diagram that is produced at the moment for income. There are sensationally revealing graphs, which show the distribution of income worldwide and that show the distribution of income and wealth within a country. Those, of course, show this long, relatively flat line at a very low level, and then the sudden swoop up where it might be the top 5%, it might be the top 1%, it might be the top 10%, massively better off than other people.

Now it would be very interesting to see what happens when you replace the variable, substitute well-being for wealth. Now, can you give good figures for things like the range of opportunities? My guess is that clever social scientists can do something, at least, in this direction. They can, as it were, take the kinds of attractive opportunities that people strive for and look at how many of those are available to particular kinds of people within the society and try to focus on the distribution end of well-being in that way. I think it's possible. I think it's very difficult and probably would generate all sorts of controversies. But start with what the opportunities people want, or people tend to want if they have them within reach, or aspire to if they don't have them within reach. It's not clear when you focus here, would you focus on people in their teenage years? Would you focus on them when they're small? Do you produce separate graphs for both then now have a look and see what range of opportunities are available to a large number of people. My guess is you get the same sort of graph that you get for wealth.

Durlauf: So I'll mentioned a couple of dimensions where I think there has been progress on thinking about inequality of opportunity. One of them is associated with Francisco Ferreira, Paolo Brunori, Vito Peragine, and they've developed a notion of inherited inequality. It's based on John Roemer's ideas. The thing they're able to calculate, they've done extraordinary data work, is what fraction of inequality for a set of countries is explained by things known at age 18. And so using the argument that those are a lower bound that we're not responsible for, they're able to show that there's substantial cross-country variation there, but also quantify at least in the Roemer sense, the non-responsible inequalities.

I think the other issue, which is very much in the spirit of what you've been talking about, is we need measures that I'm going to say are nonlinear. I think that we're interested in the tails in many ways. In other words, whether or not for people that are disadvantaged is that bottleneck or trap in economist and social science jargon. Same thing through about the rich. In other words, are there extremely elite, affluent people, which they have the privilege, the pleasure of being stuck in permanent affluence across generations? There are some methods I think, and something for what it's worth, that I've been working on with wonderful co-authors to try to really capture the tail behavior because those are really antithetical in their own ways to how we think about meritocracy.

Kitcher: Yeah, I would like there to be studies of the ways in which trajectories of poverty go across the generations. I would like to know much more than I do know about the ways in which diminished opportunities beget further diminished opportunities. My sense is that what we've seen in the United States in the past 50 years is a downward trend in diminution of opportunities at a fair bit of the spectrum of wealth, actually. And it would be very interesting to know that, and it would be very interesting to try to understand the sense that many people have of being left behind, which I see as expressed in the MAGA movement, actually. There's a certain reasonableness to it. These people feel that they have been left behind, they have been left behind, and they grab at somebody who will offer them something different, whether or not that person has any interest in delivering something different to those people, or delivering them what they want.

I mean I think this part of the Trump second term election came after I'd finished writing the book. And if it hadn't, I would have pursued this theme further, this theme of the diminishing spiral of people who are left behind. In a certain sense, this has been approached by Anne Case and Angus Deaton in their studies of abilities to protect your health. And for the British case, also to some extent, by Anthony Atkinson, I think those things are very, very important to look at.

What about the top end? Well, this is a very interesting thing. I mean, one of Mills arguments back in the middle of the 19th century for having inheritance taxes was that this

was not only something that prevented the distribution of income and opportunities to the poor. It was also very bad for the rich. His thought was that the rich never bothered to develop their talents. They wasted their lives because they were guaranteed a hefty inheritance right from the beginning. I don't know, but whether there are burdens on the rich, I guess, I think they're much less important than the burdens on the poor. But I think it's at least worth looking at that.

Durlauf: The efficiency argument seems to me pretty clear. If you think about labor markets moving people to the positions where they'd be most productive, inherited wealth is inconsistent with that because that means that it's the offspring of the entrepreneurs that are put in the same positions, et cetera. And so I'm making a little bit light of it, but if you sort of think systematically about what it means for elites to reproduce, there's always going to be efficiency losses associated with that.

Kitcher: We're circling around one of the things that is most important to me about the kind of argument that I've been pursuing, which is the withdrawal of ethics from political life. And I don't just mean by that that we now accept behavior on the part of our political leaders that would have been absolute disaster for them 40 or 50 years ago. What I mean is that we don't think, when we think about policy matters, in ethical terms; we think about the notion of efficiency, economic efficiency, has replaced the notion of the good. And that's, I think, a disaster. Not just in the United States. This is something which I think is responsible for a lot of the erosion of kindness in all sorts of places.

Durlauf: So I think that's a natural place to talk about foreign aid and the obligations of rich societies to those that are less affluent, which you write about extensively in the book. And so I was hoping you could outline the basic vision you have of just aid to less developed societies.

Kitcher: Well, the first thing to be said is that there are, I think, really good critiques of the ways in which aid has been delivered. I mean, I think William Easterly's critique of sort of well-intentioned programs to the developing world is spot on. Now what exactly should foreign aid do? Here I'm much influenced by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. I think of this in terms of capabilities. And what seems to be required is a partnership between, as it were, the rich and the potential developers that can work together to do two things. One is to develop plans for what opportunities seem to emerge in their reflections and conversations as most important as the first step to development, to further development. That's the first thing to do. But that also has to be mechanisms for avoiding the sorts of disasters that Easterly points to, where in fact the giving of aid seems to make the situation worse.

I mean, I think that there are relatively straightforward cases. I think the case of aid to health where certain kinds of programs have been relatively successful. Those kinds of programs that were abruptly shut off when Trump decided that USAID would go out of business. I mean, that seems to me to be a terrible loss. And it shows, therefore, that something that went on beforehand was actually doing some good, doing some working. But this is not going to be a very easy thing to work out. It's going to need ethical exploration. And that exploration has to have representatives from the affected country and from the potential donors.

I start where I do in the book, because in 1959, when C.P. Snow gave his famous lecture on the two cultures and the scientific revolution, it was quite uncontroversial that the rich world had an obligation to the poor world. Snow drew the moral that what we needed was a reform in education that was utterly controversial. It precipitated a firestorm. Snow said, we've got to have more scientists to do this project of delivering technology to the developing world. Everybody said, well, we need to do that. But we mustn't reform our education to do it. Fast forward to now, what do you see? Well, do you see people say, well, we definitely need to reform our education because we've got to have more technologists, more scientists, more engineers and more mathematicians, because those people are the keys to our productivity. But deliver aid to other people. Whoever thought of that? What we've got to do is compete with other nations to make sure that we retain our place or get further ahead if possible. It's a complete inversion. That episode and that change has within it a picture of the way the world has changed.

Durlauf: So I want to follow the discussion of foreign aid and obligations in terms of history. In other words, in the case of less developed countries, there's irreducible—The facts of slavery and colonialism are essential in understanding aspects of the deprivation there. How does that affect the obligations? Or should we think more abstractly that simply when people are disadvantaged, they ought to be helped?

Kitcher: I think the ideal that was widely accepted in the 50s and 60s was the simple fact that they are relatively disadvantaged. We have these means of transforming our lives from what they used to be that have made us much more comfortable and much better able to live than we used to be able to live. That we should try to spread those benefits all around. That's an obligation and it doesn't have anything to do—that basic obligation has nothing to do with the fact that we have sometimes done bad things and exploited these countries. On the other hand, that exploitation and that kind of enslavement in some cases intensifies the obligation. So I can imagine people saying in 1959, well, of course, Mr. Snow, you're completely right. We do have an obligation independently of our colonial past to help these people, and it's even more of an obligation precisely because some of this has been

brought about by what we have done. I mean, there's a sense in which this is a redoubling argument. We should be doing that because of our past actions. We *really* should be doing it. Maybe we should be doing it more in the places that we've most affected, but we owe all of the poor a better life.

Durlauf: So the book also talks about climate change and obligations there. Could you describe your thinking?

Kitcher: Well, a part of the book is, of course, about climate change, which is very much on my mind. The world has gotten used to making claims about what a nation will do and then looking on as that nation spectacularly fails to do it. This whole sequence of years and decades since the 1980s, with Hansen's announcement to Congress, has been one in which we have actually generated as many emissions as we did before Hansen delivered that message to Congress. It's a really striking fact that half the emissions that we have put into the atmosphere have occurred since we actually knew what we were doing. It seems to me unlikely that when you've got participants who are going to these meetings who are driven by an economic imperative, we have to retain our place in the economic hierarchy, or even better, improve it. We should, that's what we should be doing. They aren't going to be inclined to do things which will make large contributions to nations that might need to develop a sort of green infrastructure with our aid.

So cooperation is completely undercut by this and it's undercut because we've basically opted out of the ethical policy business. We don't do that anymore. What we do is we govern policy by the need to produce as much as possible and we're not going to do anything that goes too strongly against that, are we? If we can stay ahead with a little bit of giving, well, that's fine. We might do that if we feel so inclined or we might not. But we don't have any obligation to do anything about this. As a result, we will go on and on and on neglecting to approach this problem at the scale of which it needs to be approached. I'm profoundly worried about this.

Durlauf: So I wanted to ask you to give some advice to aspiring social scientists because your book is a profoundly moral discussion of social science and that leads to the question of thinking about the navigation of the fact-value dichotomy. And so how would you describe your thinking there?

Kitcher: You know, I mean I don't think that even if I thought very hard about this for a long time, I would be able to do very much in the way of giving advice to social scientists. I don't think I've thought you're right that having just been hit with this rather good question, that I can say much off the cuff. But I would say this, I think if one could get social scientists to come away from rather simplistic measures of happiness or wellbeing, that would be a

good thing. I think if there were a partnership between people who think about the quality of life in many, many different disciplines, historians, philosophers, even literary scholars might have a role to play here. If those people were in more communication with social scientists, we might get better measures and better statistics. I would advise social scientists to try to produce distributional graphs about wellbeing in certain respects. I mean again, I'm going to look at people like Atkinson, and Case, and Angus Deaton. People who are already starting to do this with respect to a few variables. I think what we need is much more of that. Angus Deaton has, of course, said you need a partnership. Economics needs to go back to having a partnership with philosophy. That seems to me right. I think if we look at the history of economics, there's an early history where it's political economy, and that's explicitly tinged with moral and ethical inquiry from the beginning. I mean, all of the great figures in sort of pre-classical political economy seem to have thought very hard about what kinds of goals ought to be achieved and what kinds of actions ought to be taken.

That carries over, I think. I think it's there in Marshall, and it's definitely there in Pigou and in Keynes. I mean, Keynes is a very serious thinker about these kinds of issues. Then it goes away. It goes away, in my opinion, because Friedman has this view that positive economics makes no value judgments whatsoever. And Hayek has this view that there's only one value that we ought to be thinking about, which is freedom understood as "don't you interfere with me." And those two sort of trends have, I think, done in the last 50 years a lot of harm. I mean, I'm much moved, as you know, from reading the book, by Alvin Roth's claim. I mean, he doesn't apply it with anything like the generality I would, but his claim that, you know, when you set up a market, you have to decide first what goals you're going to try to achieve. That seems to me a task in demanding, a kind of much broader reflection than economics, lot of economics has engaged in for quite a long time now.

Durlauf: I think that's right, you know, with obviously very important exceptions. An easy example of that is the emphasis on Pareto optimality as a value of criterion, which of course ignores, any possible distributional issues. Now, to be fair, most policy evaluations don't focus on that when people are actually simulating or constructing models to evaluate well-being or welfare consequences of policies, but then they're strictly utilitarian. In other words, they have some notion of a utility across a set of actors, you average them up, and that gives an answer. So that captures something about egalitarian considerations, but it misses two things. One, the prioritarianism, which I think intuitively, or for good reasons, people think should be there. And the other is it doesn't really ask the justice questions, about whether or not, you know, equality of opportunity definitions, whether it's the wrong or sense, or have you or being fulfilled. So all of that, I think, makes for great opportunities

for collaboration. And I will self-servingly say, I think the Stone Center here at Chicago is trying to do, create those communications.

Kitcher: You know, you've pointed to two issues that do come up with utilitarianism, but one should remember, I think, this is not something that even philosophers trumpet or even know about very much, that after his father had died, and after Bentham had died, John Stuart Mill said what he really thought about Bentham, which is that he had as vulgar a conception of human life and the human mind as it is possible to have. You know, he thought that this Benthamite sort of consideration of happiness, understood in this very sort of material way, was just appalling. And so early in his career, Mill writes these two essays, one about Bentham and one about Coleridge. Coleridge is, of course, complete *bête noire* of the utilitarian reformist movement, all this stuff about community and people engaging in other goods besides material goods. And Mill said, you know, Coleridge has got something right here. We need a conception of the good that is far richer than Bentham has. And people, the way people understand Mill, I think, is actually sort of stripped down from what he actually believed. He had a very rich conception of the good. And that comes out in his social writings.

So the task for the social scientist, this comes back to your original suggestion about well being, is to formulate a notion of well being that is much richer. So you want the egalitarian stuff and the distributional stuff to be in there, but you also want a serious consideration of what kinds of variables are important to well being. And you can see this happening as people like Sen and Case and Deaton and Atkinson start to explore this. You know, they all focus on something that they think has been left out and they will try to study that. Well, what you need is lots and lots and lots of people doing that and putting it all together.

Durlauf: So I was hoping we could talk about your book on education, *The Main Enterprise of the World*. It is such a rich book. I was afraid to actually start with a question. So I was hoping you could sort of communicate to the listeners the major themes of your arguments.

Kitcher: I'm quite worried about education because I think under the impact of contemporary economic arrangements, the emphasis is on one of three important goals. And that is on getting children to be able to be in a position to maintain themselves, actually getting them not only to be in a position to maintain themselves, but to play their appropriate role in the nation's economy, which is to produce. And this I think is very clear in the STEM movement. I mean, you get even quite relatively progressive people like Obama sign on to this. This is quite at odds with two other very important goals for education. One might think that it's actually quite important not only to get people to be able to maintain themselves, but also to live in a society as good fellow citizens with one another.

So there's an education for citizenship, which I tie actually to an appropriate form of moral education, which involve under my thinking, getting children to work together and make joint decisions together and understand one another's needs and options from a very early stage. But there's also, of course, the fact that people have different talents. A very important educational ideal is guiding people and helping young children of a very early age up through their teens and beyond to try to understand what it is that interests them, what they are suited to do, ways in which they can make a contribution. And I'm worried about what will happen in a few generations' time where you've got all these people who have been told you must be scientists, you must be engineers, you must be mathematicians. I think this is not going to go well. I think in fact, this is a place in which something we were talking about earlier—the worries about the affluent—come out because there's tremendous pressure, of course, on affluent parents to send their children to certain kinds of schools.

So there's competition already at that stage to push them into particular kinds of professions, to push them towards particular kinds of subjects. And that gets in the way of what one might think of as the child's autonomous development. So I try in the book to say something about the ways in which we might overcome this. But I think it's important to treat all of these three ideals. You don't want children coming out who can't sustain themselves or are going to be hopeless and destitute throughout their whole lives. But neither do you want children coming out as people who are at odds with the life that they've sort of been pressured into, nor do you want people coming out who are incapable of engaging as fellow citizens with one another. So all of these three things are very important. And I take the economic turn that came 50 or so years ago as mucking all of this up and giving us an idea of education that is severely distorted—not only distorted, distorting.

Durlauf: I think both Columbia and Chicago with their core curriculum, the great books programs, those are antithetical to the produced workers or produced highly productive, in a weight-sense individuals. But they're integral to what we want education to do in terms of creating richer lives for people, producing better citizens. And of course, producing all of those dimensions where market compensation is not as sufficient statistic.

Kitcher: Very good. So I spent three years—I did a three-year term, as the person in charge of one of Columbia's core courses. In fact, the original one, so-called Introduction to Contemporary Civilization. I used to say, I'm in charge of contemporary civilization, someone has to be. But that course, which is a sophomore course for us, and its predecessor, Literature in Humanities, are amazingly popular with alumni. They feel that this is the heart of their education at Columbia. And they work wonderfully well, and they help people go in all sorts of new directions. This is part of what education should be, but

it's actually not such a huge part. There's a whole lot more that comes long before they get to being, you know, 19 or 20 or something like that. There's plenty that should be done in those years too.

As you know, in the book, I lay out some ways in which I think education should go, various kinds of curriculums and so forth. And the ways in which this relates to the various societal pressures that we currently suffer, it is interesting that both Chicago and Columbia continue to have this. It exists in smaller ways, at other, some other places, but these are the two institutions that practice it most, shall we say, flagrantly. I wish that this was a movement, an educational movement that would not only spread around American universities, but spread around universities in other countries too, and spread backwards through the curriculum that children have before they get to university.

We do need a much broader conception of education. We do need to understand that not everybody is going to want to be a statistician or a sort of solve differential equations. I mean, there are people who can contribute enormously to our society who haven't got any talent at that whatsoever. And it shouldn't all be factored down to, well, they can make movies and then the movies will sell. And that'll be good. Their contributions are valuable for human development in its own right. And subordinating everything to the profitability of a company or the productivity of a nation state is just simply getting their own priorities from the beginning.

Durlauf: That's actually a desiccated conception of the good life. It is really quite remarkable that it's become so salient.

Kitcher: So may I say something about the title of my book? I mean, I was struck by this line of Emerson's when I read it: "The main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the upbuilding of a man. Well, forgive him, the man gently replaced that by human being." But it seems to me that's absolutely right. What we do in passing on to the next generation, what has been already achieved and the talents that are developed to build on that and to make it better, it's the most important thing we do. I have a picture of human life over the very long term. And you know this from my book, *The Ethical Project*, I suspect, which sees it as working well when we learn more and more about how to respond to one another, work together to do things that make life better for all of us. And a very important part of that is making sure that across the generations, things are passed on that are needed for the tasks of continuing to make improvements.

I think Emerson was right that this is the most import— this is the central human task. I want to articulate it in terms of these three ideals. You know, personal fulfillment, citizenship and self-maintenance and in a, limited way productivity.

Durlauf: So I was hoping you could elaborate a bit your thinking about Dewey in *Democracy and Education*.

Kitcher: One of the most important things I think in Dewey's important book, *Democracy and Education*, is where he says, "Democracy isn't a form of government. It's a shared way of life." And that seems to be right. Democracy doesn't work if what we're doing is basically yelling at one another and then trying to rally enough people to win at the polls for our side, as it were. Government by the people requires there to be *a people*. And for there to be people, there's got to be degrees of mutual understanding, which is why I emphasize in the educational program that I put forward this idea of learning to work together, learning to plan together, learning to deliberate together, which can go through a kind of sort of step-by-step progression. We start with very simple things in children who know one another, and then we move on to dealing with much more complicated things and people who are very different from us.

I think it can be done. I've actually been extremely encouraged by what some political scientists have done, and also by what psychologists have discovered about getting people to deliberate peacefully and productively with one another. I mean, very simple, very simple instructions make a huge difference, it turns out. I wouldn't believe that. It seems beyond my hopes. But apparently you can get a long way by getting people to soften their language, don't assert something outright. Have people say, you know, I feel the productivity is really, quite important. That makes a huge difference to whether the dialogue goes well or not.

Durlauf: I wanted you to say something about parental rights because much of the activity in education in the United States is pushing away from the ability of schools to teach things that don't have prior parental approval. This is linked to removing books from libraries, requiring parents to sign off, et cetera. And how do you think about that?

Kitcher: This is not going to come as a surprise to you. I think that there have to be, you know, very serious discussions with people. I mean, I think the schools should not simply capitulate. I think they should explain, you know, why is this book important for your children to read? Why are you so afraid that this book will corrupt them? These are things that should be discussed and talked about. And sometimes it may be true that given that a particular child with a particular experience has certain kinds of fears or concerns, it may not be appropriate for that child to read a particular text. I can understand that. But these things need to be worked out, you know, then it imposes some burden on the school to try to try to explain and think hard about why a particular work is important. But, you know, that explanation should be given and it should be given in the context of what the parents

believe and they should be asked really to think about that explanation, whether they try to bring them around.

This is not a battle, right? You know, 'we've got to teach this.' 'You can't teach that because it's so revolting and it will do awful things psychologically to my child.' I mean, these are both sort of maybe starting positions, but they are positions that need to be greatly nuanced by giving details, explanations and understanding one another.

Durlauf: And that's the essence of democracy, the way you've described it.

Kitcher: Exactly. Exactly. It's that's Deweyan democracy. We live together. Let's try to understand one another's lives.

Durlauf: So Philip, I could talk to you for another two hours. I'm just very grateful, absolutely delightful for the opportunity to have the chance to talk with you.

Kitcher: I've enjoyed the conversation a lot. Thank you very much.

Durlauf: So this has been Philip Kitcher discussing a range of issues that really are on the philosophy, social science interface—essential questions in how society should think about the disadvantage, what the obligations are, how social scientists need to better measure, conceptualize the consequences of policy, along with an extraordinary humane and wide-raising view of a better world when we think about education as a producer of a better world.

The Inequality Podcast is a production of the Stone Center for Research on Wealth Inequality and Mobility at the University of Chicago. I want to end the podcast with thanks to the people who really make it happen. First, I want to express deep appreciation to our producer and engineer Shane McKeon, who oversees every aspect of the process of creating these podcasts and really does just a splendid job. Second, I'd like to thank our assistant director Nina Gray for production oversight and the role she plays in bringing the podcast to fruition. Finally, I'd like to thank Grace Kolavo, who's the executive director of the Stone Center who basically does everything in terms of making the center work. You may get in touch with us at StoneCenter@uchicago.edu. Thank you so much for listening.

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