



American Heritage Discussion Series: Learners with Littles

Study Guide for Session IV: Keeping Our Republic

Overall Essential Question—How can we maintain our constitutional republic?

Excerpts about civic virtue from revolutionary era state constitutions—Essential Question: What is the significance of emphasizing civic virtue at the creation of a new form of self-government?

- The state constitution excerpts identify the blessings of liberty as the product of upholding a variety of virtues. Why?

Excerpt of a letter between Alexis de Tocqueville and Francisque de Corcelle, September 17, 1853 and Modern Interpretation of Habits of the Hearts and Minds of Men (and Women) —Essential Question: According to Tocqueville, how is democracy maintained?

- Tocqueville, the author of *Democracy in America* writes to his peer 20 years after the publication of his work, saying that democratic societies are not created by laws, but by sentiments, beliefs, ideas, and habits of the hearts and minds of men. Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, how important are laws in maintaining democratic government compared to beliefs, ideas, and habits of the hearts and minds of men (and women)?
- What are the habits of the hearts and minds of men Tocqueville observed among Americans in 1831 that he believed fostered democracy?
- How can we foster these habits of the heart and mind today both collectively and personally?

Summary of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*—Essential Question: Why is social capital important for maintaining a constitutional republic?

- What is social capital? How does it relate to maintaining a constitutional republic?
- What are the benefits and draw backs of bonding communities? What are the benefits of bridging communities? Why are both important?
- Why has social capital declined in recent decades? Why is this concerning?
- How can we increase social capital today? How does this help keep our republic?

Excerpt on contempt in American society from Arthur Brooks' *Love Your Enemies*—Essential Question: How can we improve our public discourse across our differences? Why is this important?

- Why is widespread contempt dangerous?
- What are the five rules the author proposes? How might these rules help to dispel contempt?
- How can improving our public discourse help keep our republic?



Civic Virtue in Revolutionary Era State Constitutions

VIRGINIA

Adopted June 12, 1776

That no free government, or the blessings of liberty, can be preserved to any people but by a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, frugality, and virtue and by frequent recurrence to fundamental principles.

Virginia Declaration of Rights, sec. XV.

National Archives <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/virginia-declaration-of-rights>

PENNSYLVANIA

Adopted September 28, 1776

That a frequent recurrence to fundamental principles, and a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, industry, and frugality are absolutely necessary to preserve the blessings of liberty, and keep a government free: The people ought therefore to pay particular attention to these points in the choice of officers and representatives, and have a right to exact a due and constant regard to them, from their legislatures and magistrates, in the making and executing such laws as are necessary for the good government of the state.

Pennsylvania Declaration of Rights, sec. XIV.

Yale Law School The Avalon Project https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/pa08.asp

VERMONT

Adopted July 8, 1777

That frequent recurrence to fundamental principles, and a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, industry and frugality, are absolutely necessary to preserve the blessings of liberty, and keep government free. The people ought, therefore, to pay particular attention to these points, in the choice of officers and representatives, and have a right to exact a due and constant regard to them, from their legislators and magistrates, in the making and executing such laws as are necessary for the good government of the State.

Vermont Declaration of Rights, sec. XVI.

Yale Law School, The Avalon Project https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/vt01.asp

NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Hampshire Bill of Rights, adopted October 31, 1783

A frequent recurrence to the fundamental principles of the Constitution, and a constant adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, industry, frugality, and all the social virtues, are indispensably necessary to preserve the blessings of liberty and good government; the people ought, therefore, to have a particular regard to all those principles in the choice of their officers and representatives: and they have a right to require of their law-givers and magistrates, an exact and constant observance of them in the formation and execution of the laws necessary for the good administration of government.

New Hampshire Declaration of Rights, sec. XXXVIII

Teaching American History <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/new-hampshire-bill-of-rights/>

MASSACHUSETTS

Adopted October 25, 1780

A frequent recurrence to the fundamental principles of the constitution, and a constant adherence to those of piety, justice, moderation, temperance, industry, and frugality, are absolutely necessary to preserve the advantages of liberty and to maintain a free government. The people ought, consequently, to have a particular attention to all those principles, in the choice of their officers and representatives; and they have a right to require of their lawgivers and magistrates an exact and constant observation of them, in the formation and execution of the laws necessary for the good administration of the commonwealth.

Massachusetts Declaration of Rights, Art. XVIII

ConSource.org <https://www.consource.org/document/constitution-of-massachusetts-1780-10-25/>

Drawn from the conference presentation “The American state constitutional tradition and the moral virtue of the citizenry” by Dr. John Dinan of Wake Forest University, presented at Utah Valley University on November 2, 2023.

Tocqueville to Corcelle, 17 September 1853

OC, XV, 2, p. 81

"Political societies are not made by their laws, but are prepared in advance by the sentiments, beliefs, ideas, the habits of the hearts and minds of the men who are part of them, and by what nature and education have made those men. If this truth does not emerge from all parts of my book, if it does not in this sense constantly bring readers back to themselves, if it does not point out to them at every moment, without ever blatantly displaying the pretension of teaching them, the sentiments, ideas, mores that alone can lead to prosperity and public liberty, the vices and errors that on the contrary inevitably push prosperity and public liberty away, I will not have attained the principal and, so to speak, the only goal that I had in view."

Of the Influence of Mores on Maintaining the Democratic Republic in the United States

"I said above that I considered the mores as one of the great general causes to which maintaining the democratic republic in the United States can be attributed."

Modern Interpretation of Tocqueville's Conditions for Habits of the Hearts and Minds of Men (and Women) in American Communities

The first four of these conditions can be viewed as collective while the last three can be viewed as personal.

1. Equality of opportunity, knowledge and status exist in the community
 - No one person has all the answers or all the authority
 - Collective wisdom
2. Settings exist in the community for meaningful and sustained dialogue
 - Meetings in the town square or other public gathering spaces
3. Shared interests and reasons of mutual support are to be found in the community
 - Self-interest is served by assisting others
4. Civic associations (non-government community-oriented institutions) are prevalent in the community
 - Citizens solve local problems rather than solely waiting for the government to act
5. Emphasis is placed on useful action within the community
 - Community members are aware of each other and the problems to be solved in the community
6. Emphasis is placed on experience-based action within the community
 - Informed action based on experience, not theory
7. Abiding belief is to be found in the community regarding human progress and a sense of greater purpose in life
 - Religion encourages tight-knit communities focused on fellowship
 - Commitment based on dedication to a higher principle or purpose.
 - Idea that every person is worthy of respect by virtue of being human

Excerpt from William Bergquist in Library of Professional Psychology, with some adjustment

<https://library.psychology.edu/de-tocqueville-and-the-communities-of-heart/3/>

***Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* By Robert D. Putnam**

Summary written by Brett Reeder, Conflict Research Consortium

Source: <https://www.beyondintractability.org/bksum/putnam-bowling>

Social capital refers to "the connections among individuals' social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." (p 19) Much like the economic concepts of physical and human capital, the social networks of social capital are thought to have value. *Bowling Alone* empirically demonstrates a drop in social capital in contemporary America, identifies the cause and consequences of this drop, and suggests ways to improve social capital in the future.

Though social capital varies across many dimensions, according to Putnam. the most important distinction is between bridging (inclusive) and bonding (exclusive) social capital. Bonding social capital networks are inward-looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups. Examples of such networks include ethnic fraternal organizations and country clubs. On the other hand, bridging social capital networks are outward looking and include people across "diverse social cleavages." Examples of bridging social capital include the civil rights movement and youth service groups.

In general, bonding networks are most useful when specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity is necessary for "getting by" in oppressive situations. Bridging networks are good for linking to external assets and for information diffusion for the purpose of "getting ahead" of the status quo. As Putnam put it, "bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40" (p 23). While useful for analytical purposes, this bonding/bridging distinction is not an "either or" category, but is rather a "more or less" dimension. That is, social capital can (and usually does) exist in both a bonding and a bridging forms simultaneously. For example: a black church may bond individuals based on race and religious belief, but bridge individuals across class lines.

Having described what social capital is, Putnam turns his attention to how it has changed over time by conducting a meta-analysis of a large body of data from various sources. In doing so, he identifies a dominant theme: "For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago--silently, without warning--that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current" (p 27). Thus, social capital increased in the US until the 1970s and then suddenly decreased right up to the present. This theme is consistent across seven separate measures of social capital, including: political participation, civic participation, religious participation, workplace networks, informal networks, mutual trust, and altruism.

Though most measures indicate a significant drop in social capital over the last three decades, Putman identifies four exceptions: an increase in volunteerism among youth, the growth in telecommunications, grassroots activity among evangelical conservatives, and an increase in

self-help support. However, these exceptions do not offset the overall trend, indeed, by virtually every conceivable measure, social capital has eroded steadily and sometimes dramatically over the past two generations." (p 287)

To identify why this might be, Putnam looked to see "whether the declines in civic engagement (social capital) are correlated across time and space with certain social characteristics" (p 185). Once he identified a correlation, he applied three additional tests to ensure the validity of potential causal factors. First, all correlations he identified had to lack spuriousness. Second, the proposed explanatory factor had to change in the relevant way. Finally, the direction of causation (result vs. cause) was questioned. Using these standards, Putnam rejected several common explanations for the contemporary drop in social capital, none of which were found to have had a statistically significant effect. These included educational deficiency, destruction of the nuclear family, race and racism, big government and the welfare state, and market economics.

Additionally he identified four social characteristics that passed his tests of validity: pressures of time and money, mobility and sprawl, television, and generational differences. The lion's share (up to 50%) of the change in social capital over the last three decades is thought to be attributable to generational differences. People born in the 20s and 30s are significantly more socially connected than later generations, largely as a result of social habits and values developed during the "great mid-century cataclysm" or World War II. Generational differences are also synergistic with TV, as different generations have different habits regarding TV. As a whole, TV is thought to contribute up to 25%, the pressures of time and money, about 10%, and sprawl another 10% because it takes more time to get places. Sprawl is hence associated with increasing social segregation, and it disrupts community "boundedness". This leaves at least 15% unexplained.

But does it really matter that social capital is declining? Putnam argues that, indeed, it does, as social capital "has many features that help people translate aspirations into realities." (p 288) Putnam identifies five such features. First, social capital makes collective problems easier to resolve, as there is less opposition between parties. This results in improved social environments, such as safer and more productive neighborhoods. Second, it makes business transactions easier, since when people trust each other, there is less of a need to spend time and money enforcing contracts. As a result, economic prosperity increases generally. Third, social capital widens our awareness of our mutual connectivity. This can improve the quality of our civic and democratic institutions. Fourth, it helps to increase and speed up the flow of information, which, in turn, improves education and economic production. Finally, social capital improves our health and happiness through both psychological and biological processes which require human contact.

Unfortunately the effects of social capital are not always positive. Indeed, bonding social capital, in particular, can lead to destructive divisions within and between societies as groups develop a collective identity based largely on exclusion. But the "classical liberal argument"

against community (or social capital networks) is its potential to restrict freedom and tolerance. Closely-linked communities (those with high social capital) can restrict individual freedoms through social pressure, especially if tolerance and freedom are not values of the community. Putnam acknowledges that this can happen, but it is not an inherent effect of social capital. In fact, he provides evidence to the contrary which suggests that, "Far from being incompatible, liberty and fraternity (or bonding social capital) are mutually supportive, and this remains true when we control for other factors" (p 356).

Another argument against community holds that social capital can encourage inequality by concentrating wealth in closed communities. Again, Putnam acknowledges that this can happen, but is not a necessary consequence of community or social capital. Instead he argues that while "[s]ocial inequalities may sometimes be embedded in social capital ...both across space and across time, equality and fraternity (bonding social capital) are strongly positively correlated." (p 358-359). Thus, while social capital can, at times, restrict freedom, and enhance inequality, it does not inherently do so. On the contrary, empirical evidence suggests that social capital, freedom, and equality are in general, mutually reinforcing.

But what can we do to improve our social capital? According to Putnam, we should first learn from the past where "lessons can be found in a period uncannily like our own" (p 367). The period he is referring to consists of roughly 1870-1915. During this time "dramatic technological, economic, and social change rendered obsolete a significant stock of social capital" (p 368) due to industrial revolution, urbanization, and waves of new immigration. In response, the leaders of the day re-developed social capital with an "extraordinary burst of social inventiveness and political reform" (p 368), which included the founding or refurbishing of most of our contemporary civic institutions such as the Boy Scouts, the NRA and the NAACP.

While the specific reforms of this time period "are no longer appropriate for our time...the practical, enthusiastic idealism of that era--and its achievements-- should inspire us" (p 401). In this vein, Putnam makes general suggestions in seven "spheres deserving special attention" with the intention of encouraging readers to develop contemporary innovative solutions.

1. First, he suggests educational reforms be undertaken, including improved civics education, well designed service learning programs, extra curricular activities and smaller schools.
2. He argues for a more family-oriented workplace which allows for the formation of social capital on the job.
3. He encourages further efforts at new urbanism.
4. He would like to see religion become both more influential and at the same time more tolerant.
5. The technologies that reinforce, rather than replace, face-to-face interaction should be encouraged.

6. Art and culture should become more interactive.
7. Finally, politics requires campaign reforms and a decentralization of power.

Conclusion

In this important book, Putnam demonstrates that social capital increased between 1900 and the late 1960s and then dramatically decreased, largely as a result of generational succession, television, urban sprawl and the increasing pressures of time and money. This has resulted in an increase in a variety of social problems ranging from ineffective education to economic strain, to social conflict between individuals as well as groups. The solution to these problems likely rests with re-developing social capital, much like was done in the Progressive Era (but with solutions designed for contemporary America).

Though not inherent to community development, such a project must take into account the potential of social capital to limit liberty and equality. This is particularly true when developing bonding social capital which is unfortunately much easier to develop than bridging social capital as, "Social capital is often most easily created in opposition to something or someone else." (p 361) While bonding social capital can help oppressed people to "get by" through solidarity, bridging social capital is required to "get ahead" through increased generalized norms of reciprocity. The development of innovative forms of such social capital is Putnam's ultimate challenge to the reader.

Citation: Putnam, Robert D., 2000, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY

Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from the Culture of Contempt
By Arthur C. Brooks
Conclusion: Five Rules to Subvert the Culture of Contempt
pp. 201–214

Every parent knows by heart his or her kid’s favorite book. You have to read it to them every single night, sometimes multiple times, for months and years on end. It’s like something they’d make you do at Guantanamo, and it gets seared permanently into your brain. My poor dad could recite Dr. Seuss’s *Yertle the Turtle*, word for word, until the day he died.

For whatever reason, my own kids loved *The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown, written in 1949. It goes through everyday things a child would see and lists what is “important” about them.

Here’s one little snippet to give you an idea:

*The important thing about rain is
that it is wet.
It falls out of the sky,
and it sounds like rain,
and makes things shiny,
and it does not taste like anything,
and is the color of air.
But the important thing about rain
is that it is wet.*¹

I always suspected that Margaret Wise Brown was secretly moonlighting as a beat poet. She would play the bongos for a minute, and then, while taking a deep drag on her cigarette, say, “The important thing about rain is that it is wet. *Can you dig it?*”

Anyway, I remember that book every time I’m finishing a new hook of my own and am writing the conclusions chapter, which is supposed to sum up the important point of my book in a memorable way. So here goes, in the style of Margaret Wise Brown:

*The important thing about contempt is
that it is bad for us.
Sometimes we don’t like people who disagree with us,
and we want to tell them they are idiots,
and social media makes it easy to do,
and pundits get rich by doing it,
and maybe it seems that some of them deserve our contempt.
But the important thing about contempt
is that it is bad for us.*

(Cue the bongos.)

What is the cure for our culture of contempt? As I have argued throughout, it's not civility or tolerance, which are garbage standards. It is *love* for one another and our country. Love is the "why" of the leaders that can bring America back together, and of all of us in our families and communities.

You might note that the title of this book is actually a bit misleading. The problem I address is that we are constantly hearing that those who disagree with us are our enemies, and many Americans have begun to believe this. But in reality, these aren't my enemies at all; rather, they are simply people with whom I disagree.

I am asking you to join me in a countercultural movement. I don't know yet if it will be successful or popular. If this were a book called *Liberals Are Evil* or *Conservatives Are Stupid*, it would be a guaranteed mega-bestseller and the call to action in the last chapter would be simply to go along with what everybody else is doing. Watch a ton of cable TV and read your favorite partisan columnists; silo your news feeds on social media; curate your friends and stop talking to people on the other side; compare people you disagree with to Hitler or Stalin; make huge assumptions about others' motives; hate; hate; hate.

The call to action here is harder, because I'm asking you to join me and work to subvert the prevailing culture of contempt as a radical for love and decency. But I need to lay out the plan as specifically as possible, because it runs so counter to the currents of our prevailing culture.

So, culled from the lessons throughout this book, here are five simple rules to remember if you believe we can renew our nation and you want to be part of that movement.

Rule 1. Stand up to the Man. Refuse to be used by the powerful.

Most people don't believe they are being used by others. Why not? Think for a second about a manipulative leader—someone you know of who really uses people's hatred for his or her own goals of money, power, or fame. Got the image in your head?

Well, guess what? You have the wrong image, because that's someone you dislike. You are thinking of someone who might use others, but who can't use you, because you already see through him or her. The right image of a powerful manipulator is someone on *your side of the debate*. Maybe it's a media figure who always affirms your views, or a politician who always says what you think, or a professor who never challenges your biases. They say the other side is terrible, irredeemable, unintelligent, deviant, or anything else that expresses contempt—and say you should think these things as well.

As satisfying as it can feel to hear these things, remember: these people do not serve your interests. If you have gotten this far in this book, you (like me) have strong views on various subjects but hate the way we are being torn apart, which is what these powerful people are doing. Why do they do that? Because when they get you fired up, they make money, win elections, or get more famous and powerful.

To begin with, then, make an inventory of these kinds of figures in your life. Take your time; be honest. This is just for yourself; you don't have to post it on social media. Then set your strategy for rebellion.

Rebellion comes in one of two forms. The first is passive: tuning these manipulators out. This is most appropriate for those with whom you don't have any direct contact—a columnist or TV host, for example. Stop watching the show or reading the column. Ask yourself: Will I miss something I don't already think or know, or am I just scratching an itch? Remember: Unless the person is actually teaching you something or expanding your worldview and moral outlook, you are being used.

The second form is active—and harder: Stand up to people on your own side who trash people on the other side. It's never easy to stand up to our own friends, but contempt is destructive no matter who expresses it. You don't have to be a jerk about it. Simply be the person who gently defends those who aren't represented, even if you disagree with them. Will you get invited to fewer parties, have fewer followers on social media, and hear less gossip? Probably. But you know it's the right thing to do. And you will feel *great*.

Rule 2. Escape the bubble. Go where you're not invited, and say things people don't expect.

Just as a fire requires oxygen, the culture of contempt is sustained by polarization and separation. It is easy to express contempt for those with whom we disagree when we view them as “them” or never see them at all. Contempt is frankly much harder to express when we see one another as fellow human beings, as “us.”

A simple way to start is by going to unfamiliar ideological territory. If you're a conservative, listen to National Public Radio in the morning a couple of days a week instead of watching *FOX & Friends*, or include a few pieces from *The Atlantic* in your list of articles to read. If you're liberal, from time to time put down *The Washington Post* (unless you're reading my columns) and read *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page, or add a few conservative podcasts to your rotation of offerings from more progressive hosts.

A more serious approach involves your portfolio of relationships. Ask yourself: Do I go places where my ideas are in the minority? Do I hear diverse viewpoints? Do I have personal friendships with people who do not share my politics? Answer honestly, and make an ideologically wider social circle this year's project.

Seeking out what those on the other side have to say will help you understand others better. You will be a stronger person, less likely to be aggrieved or feel unsafe when you hear alternative points of view. Plus, such understanding will also improve your ability to articulate and defend your own beliefs in a way that others find compelling, or least defensible. You might change a mind or two. And if your argument is weak, you'll be the first to know.

Escaping the bubble also means (to mix metaphors a little) breaking out of the shackles of identity. In America today, people primarily identify themselves in strong demographic terms, including political categories. To be sure, this identification can create a sense of belonging and power in numbers. But mostly it emphasizes our differences. That is ultimately a self-defeating

proposition if what we want is a unified country that can cope with our shared challenges in the years ahead. It is a reduction to demographic identities that makes us distant and unrelatable to others and makes others seem foreign and contemptible to us.

By now readers know that one of my great moral heroes is the Dalai Lama, and I believe he understands the balance between common story and individual identity better than anyone I have ever met. Here are his words: “I’m Tibetan, I’m Buddhist, and I’m the Dalai Lama, but if I emphasize these differences, it sets me apart and raises barriers with other people. What we need to do is to pay more attention to the ways in which we are the same as other people.”²

We are called to find common ground where it genuinely exists, improve our own arguments, and win over persuadable Americans by answering hostility with magnanimity, understanding, good humor, and love. We cannot do that while hiding in our narrow ideological foxholes. This is especially true for leaders, which every person reading this book is, or can be if you so choose.

Rule 3. Say no to contempt. Treat others with love and respect, even when it’s difficult.

Contempt is the problem in our culture today, and it is never the solution. We are polarized and unable to make progress because contempt has created a bitter tribalism in America. Do not be part of this problem. No insults, no mockery. And as psychologist John Gottman taught us way back in Chapter 1, no eye-rolling!

I must come back to a point I have made repeatedly: never treat others with contempt, *even if you believe they deserve it*. First, your contempt makes any persuasion of others impossible, because no one has ever been insulted into agreement. Second, you may be wrong to assume that certain people are beyond reason. I have given plenty of examples in this book of people forming unlikely bonds precisely because they didn’t treat each other with contempt. Finally, contempt is always harmful for the contemptor. While it might feel good in the moment, it is the fast road to unhappiness and even poor health.

“How can I avoid contempt for someone who is immoral?” I hear that question every day. In virtually every case, those whom you consider to be immoral are not so in ways you care about, like compassion and fairness. They have different moral taste buds on issues like loyalty, purity, and authority, but that’s all right. Focus on the things that are most important to both of you.

What about when you are the one treated with contempt? It won’t be long before *you* are, if you are on social media or a campus or live in our society. What should be your reaction? The answer is to see it not as a threat but an opportunity. Why? Because another’s expression of contempt toward you is your opportunity to change at least one heart—your own. Respond with warm-heartedness and good humor. Your life will change a little. You are *guaranteed* to be happier. Others might see it, and if it affects them at all, it will be to the good.

It sounds like I am telling you to be a nice person. That is correct. Being contemptuous and being nice are totally incompatible. Lest you worry that being nice is deleterious to your success in work and life—that you might look like a patsy—this book gave you a trainload of empirical

evidence to the contrary. Jerks can do alright for a while, but in the end, nice guys (and girls) usually finish first.

For leaders who truly desire the common good—as opposed to manipulate the public for personal gain—repudiating contempt and embracing love for others means adopting an authoritative leadership model. Coercion, division, and polarization are ultimately counterproductive and never to be used. Rather, the goal should be to work to inspire others with a vision of hope and a model of inclusiveness toward others’ ideas.

One last word on this topic. You might be feeling a little guilty right now. If you have been connected at all to political discussion over the last few years, you may have become a combatant in the war, and guilty of saying contemptuous things about, or to, others. I have, too. What do we do about that?

Remember a few chapters ago, when I compared our contempt addiction to alcoholism? For contempt addicts who are committed to change, there’s a lesson for us from Alcoholics Anonymous. AA takes its members through twelve steps to recovery; step nine is: “Make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”

Have you hurt someone with your harsh words, mockery, or dismissiveness? Are you among the millions of Americans who have abandoned a close relationship because of politics? It’s time to apologize. Perhaps say, “I know we don’t agree, but you are more important to me than our disagreement. Sorry I let our disagreement mess up our relationship.” If the person won’t accept your apology, that’s a pity, but it still will help *your* heart.

Does this idea make you nervous? Maybe you’ll need a couple of drinks first. (Just kidding.)

Rule 4. Disagree better. Be part of a healthy competition of ideas.

If you did nothing more than glance at the cover of this book, you might be tempted to conclude that my argument is to avoid being disagreeable by disagreeing less with others. By now you know that nothing could be further from my point.

Disagreement is good because competition is good. Competition lies behind democracy in politics, and markets in the economy. Markets and democracy are the two things that have made the United States into the most successful country in history, attracting the world’s strivers, giving most readers of this book a good life, and creating a model for people all over the world. In politics and economics, competition—bounded by rule of law and morality—brings excellence.

As it is in politics and economics, so it is in the world of ideas. What is a competition of ideas called? “Disagreement.” Disagreement helps us innovate, improve, correct, and find the truth.

Of course, the competition of ideas—like free markets and free elections—requires proper behavior to function. No one thinks that hacking a voting machine is part of a healthy democracy, nor that cronyism and corruption are part of the way free enterprise is supposed to work. In fact, those things are the opposite of competition; they are ways to *avoid* competition.

Likewise, anything that makes open, respectful disagreement difficult or impossible is incompatible with a true competition of ideas.

The most obvious way we shut down the competition of ideas today is by shutting out certain voices and viewpoints. Institutions can do this—think of the movement at some universities to “de-platform” objectionable people and views—but so can individuals when they curate their news and information in a way that excludes ideas with which they disagree.

Less obvious but even more important for the competition of ideas is our attitude toward others when we disagree with them. We are in our current mess of tribalism and identity politics not because of de-platforming or social media siloing—those are symptoms of the real problem, which is our attitude of contempt toward others. Contempt shuts down the competition of ideas.

The single biggest way a subversive can change America is not by disagreeing *less*, but by disagreeing *better*—engaging in earnest debate while still treating everyone with love and respect.

Rule 5. Tune out: Disconnect more from the unproductive debates.

The last four rules summed up the lessons in this book. However, I realize I have one more I need to give you before we finish. My guess is that you, like me, are superconnected to the world of ideas. That’s great, but it can also be problematic.

For most of my life, I believed that to have a positive impact on the world, I needed to be as informed about it as possible. In my twenties, when I was making my living as a French-horn player in Barcelona, and with no plans to change career and no interest in public policy, I nevertheless decided to subscribe to *The Economist* magazine. I simply felt that I needed more information about the world to be a better citizen.

Many people subscribe to this theory. The media industry certainly wants you to. But is it right? These days, is more information better than less for your ability to be a constructive and happy citizen? Making you a constructive and happy citizen certainly isn’t the objective of much of the media today. Click on the app for your favorite newspaper and you will be immediately enmeshed in a complicated algorithm feeding you stories curated by your tastes and tendencies and specifically designed to keep you reading as long as possible. Social-media sites are engineered to feed your addiction to dopamine, the neurotransmitter implicated in all addictive activities and substances.

The free flow of information is obviously important for a free society. Public ignorance is a threat to freedom, as it aids powerful individuals with the wrong motives. And I recommend full participation in the competition of ideas. But the importance of being an informed participant does not lead in any way to the conclusion that more media in your life is always and everywhere better for you, or for America. I hope I have convinced you in this book that social media is creating tremendous problems, as is the constant outrage on ideologically siloed cable television.

The solution is selectivity and rationing. Obliterate your silos by listening, reading, and watching media on the “other side.” Get rid of your curated social media feeds. Unfollow public figures who foment contempt, even if you agree with them. Even better, cut way back on your social media use, perhaps limiting it to a few minutes a day. In addition to helping the country, you will be happier. A friend of mine—a well-known journalist with a large social-media following—once confided in me that there is little that brings him more anxiety than checking his Twitter feed. As he clicks on his notifications, he can feel his chest tighten. Maybe you can relate to this. If so, take control.

Want to get really radical? Stop talking and thinking about politics entirely for a little while. Do a politics cleanse. For two weeks—maybe over your next vacation—resolve not to read, watch, or listen to anything about politics. Don’t discuss politics with anyone. When you find yourself thinking about politics, distract yourself with something else. This is hard to do, of course, but not impossible. You just have to plan ahead and stand firm.

In discussing this proposal with friends and colleagues, I detect an inchoate fear. It goes something like this: “If I tune out politics, I may be happier, but it’s irresponsible. The fascists”—my conservative friends here say “communists”—“will run across the country with abandon.” This is a version of John Stuart Mill’s maxim, “Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends than that good men should look on and do nothing.”

Is that how you feel? Here’s the truth: If you stop talking about politics for a couple of weeks, *nothing will change*, except you might get invited to more parties because you don’t always talk about politics.

Besides, whether you know it or not, you probably need a break. Afterward, with a bit more perspective, you can come back to current events. Three predictions: First, you’ll find that politics is a little like a daytime soap opera, of which you can skip a couple of weeks without losing track of the plot. Second, you’ll see the outrage industrial complex in media and politics more clearly for what it is: a bunch of powerful people who want to keep you wound up for their own profit. Third, like any reformed addict, you’ll see how much time you were wasting and how much you were neglecting people and things you truly love.

After you come back from your politics cleanse, how can you keep from falling back into your old patterns? Resolve to pay attention to *ideas*, not just politics. As I said at the very outset of this book, they aren’t the same thing; ideas are like the climate, whereas politics is like the weather. The world is full of amateur political weather forecasters. The world needs more people who are thoughtful about the climate of ideas. Perhaps most important, while politics creates animus and contempt, people can generally disagree about ideas without bitterness. I know of no one who has stopped talking to a family member over disagreements about the merits of the idea of a universal basic income, for example.

I just reduced this whole book to a few lessons. Want it even simpler? Go find someone with whom you disagree; listen thoughtfully; and treat him or her with respect and love. The rest will flow naturally from there.

Think of it like missionary work. Missionaries are generally ordinary people with a vision for a better world that they want to share. They face a lot of opposition. In places like China, they are in physical danger, and even here in the United States, most people hear the knock on the door from missionaries and whisper, “Pretend we’re not home!” But some open the door, and then some of those people listen and say, “I do want that.” That’s how proselytizing is supposed to work. Missionaries supply others with a new, clear, and purpose-filled vision, delivered with love and kindness (never contempt, if they want to succeed), and then give them the tools to make that vision a reality. And no matter how others receive their witness, they themselves wind up brimming with joy.

Near my home there is a Catholic retreat house where my wife and I teach marriage-preparation classes for engaged couples. (When we were engaged, we barely spoke a word of the same language. We don’t recommend this for communication.) In the chapel, there is a sign posted over the door—not the door coming in, but rather the one going out into the parking lot. It is written for people to look at as they’re leaving. It says, YOU ARE NOW ENTERING MISSION TERRITORY. The message is simple yet profound: you are here because you have found what is good and true, but you’re going to go out where people haven’t yet found what you’ve discovered. You have the privilege of sharing it, with joy, confidence, and love.

That shouldn’t be just a religious message. It should be a message to all of us who want to make America and the world better. You know what our world needs: more love, less contempt. I hope that after reading this book, you have clear ideas on how you can be part of the movement to make it so and are fired up about the prospect. So as you put down this book, I have just one thing I want you to remember:

You are now entering mission territory.