

**Irshad Manji**

What is Diversity Anyway?

February 22, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.

Virtual Event

**Transcript:**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Content</b>
<p><b>Title Slide</b> 0:00-0:08</p>	<p>The Institute for Freedom and Community Spring 2021 Series Diversity, Freedom, and Community Irshad Manji What is Diversity Anyway? February 22, 2021—7:00 p.m. Virtual Event</p>
<p><b>Introduction</b> 0:08-01:08</p>	<p><i>Edmund Santurri:</i> Good evening, everyone, and welcome to our event <i>What is Diversity Anyway?</i> with our very special guest, Irshad Manji. Our program this evening is the first of a spring series of programs at St. Olaf College on the topic of Diversity, Freedom, and Community. My name is Edmund Santurri. I’m a professor at St. Olaf College and Morrison Family Director of the college’s Institute for Freedom and Community, the Institute sponsoring tonight’s event and the spring series just mentioned.</p> <p>The purpose of <a href="#">St. Olaf’s Institute for Freedom and Community</a> is to stimulate and support free inquiry and meaningful debate of important political and social issues among students, faculty, staff, and the larger public. By exploring diverse ideas about politics, markets, and society, the Institute aims to challenge presuppositions, question easy or comfortable answers, and foster constructive civil dialog among those with differing values and contending points of view.</p>
<p><b>Acknowledgements</b> 1:08-2:14</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> For help in organizing our event tonight, very special thanks go to the Institute staff, Assistant Director Erik Grell, Administrative Assistant Linda Carlson, and Student Assistant Jess Horst. Thanks also to Jeff O’Donnell, Joshua Wyatt, and the St. Olaf Broadcast Media Services crew and to Andrea Gaalswyk, Dan Hollerung, Kari VanDerVeen of St. Olaf Marketing and Communications. Thanks to Professor Jamie Schillinger, scholar of Islam at St. Olaf for an exceedingly helpful conversation. Finally, thanks to St. Olaf College</p>

	<p>faculty and students who have integrated their study with our program this evening. Particularly, participants in the <a href="#">Public Affairs Conversation</a> supported by the Institute and taught by Professor Brendon Westler. But also courses in St. Olaf’s Religion and Psychology Departments taught by Professors Anant Rambachan, Ali Chamsheddine, and Chuck Huff. To remind our virtual audience members, you are invited to submit a question at any point during the discussion this evening by using the participate tab on the streaming page.</p>
<p><b>Introducing Distinguished Guest</b> 2:14-4:42</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> We are honored to have with us tonight Irshad Manji, a founder of Moral Courage College, which teaches people how to engage on polarizing issues without shaming or canceling those with whom one disagrees. A Professor of Leadership at New York University for many years, Irshad Manji now lectures with Oxford University’s Initiative for Global Ethics. Irshad has published a number of books, which are best sellers in some countries and banned in others. In 2003, she published <a href="#">The Trouble With Islam Today</a>, an open letter to her fellow Muslims about why anti-Semitism and other prejudices must end in the name of Allah. In 2007, Irshad turned that book into an Emmy-nominated PBS film, <a href="#">Faith Without Fear</a>. In 2011, she published the book <a href="#">Allah, Liberty &amp; Love</a>, a book in which she tries to show how Islam can be reinterpreted for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Irshad’s latest book, published in 2019 and entitled <a href="#">Don’t Label Me</a> reimagines diversity to include diversity of viewpoint. That is to say, in addition to racial diversity and ethnic diversity and diversity of sexual orientation or gender diversity. Diversity of viewpoint is to be included as we reimagine diversity. In our deeply polarized time, she says standing for what is right is not enough to make progress. We must learn to engage those with whom we disagree. Labeling is easy, but listening is a form of moral courage. Chris Rock labels the book “genius” and not everyone agrees. Irshad, I’m sure, is willing to engage in that conversation about that characterization of the book. There is much more that we might say by way of introduction to Irshad Manji’s distinctive life, journey, and impressive career. More facts will emerge in the course of our discussion, but for now, Irshad, welcome. We are so pleased and excited to have you with us this evening.</p>
<p><b>Thanks from the Guest:</b> 4:42-4:56</p>	<p><i>Irshad Manji:</i> Oh, I’m delighted to be with all of you and thank you for finding the humor in that introduction as much as I do. I was chuckling for the last 30 seconds, I must confess.</p>

<p><b>Question 1: How has your history brought you to where you are now on diversity, identity, labeling, and moral courage?</b> 4:56-6:01</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Terrific. Again, thanks for being with us. Our topic tonight, Irshad, poses the question, what is diversity anyway. But before zeroing in on that theme, I think it might be useful for our audience to hear a bit more about how your personal history as reform-minded Muslim, and that's your characterization, how your personal history as reform-minded Muslim has brought you to the place you're at with respect to questions of diversity, identity, labeling, and moral courage. You've been something of a controversial figure within the Muslim community. You self-identify as Muslim but you do so in a kind of liberal or progressive fashion. How has that history of controversy brought you to the place you occupy now on matters of diversity, identity, labeling, and so forth?</p>
<p><b>Answer to Question 1: I grew up attending regular public school in Canada and a Madrasa on Saturdays. I disagreed with the teacher's view of Islam and learned all I could at the public library and came to believe in the practice of ijthihad, or struggling with the mind in order to comprehend or grapple with the complexity of the world God has given us.</b> 6:01-11:05</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Well, how much time have you got, Ed? <i>Santurri:</i> We got all the time you need. <i>Manji:</i> I know. Not much. Let me begin this way. My family and I are refugees from East Africa and we settled in Canada. That is where I grew up attending two kinds of schools. The secular, public school of most North American children, but then on top of that, every Saturday for about eight hours at a stretch, the Islamic religious school known as the Madrasa. At the ripe old age of 14, after having asked one too many questions, I was booted out of the Madrasa and I had a choice to make. I could either leave Islam and blame this particular instructor for representing all that is wrong with Islam, or I could recognize that he was one individual who did not represent all of Islam. But at the time, because I only knew what I had learned at the Madrasa, I then had to ask, what is Islam. I decided not to leave the faith. To very much stay within and ask more questions. Where? At the highly secular institution known as the public library. That is where I read everything I could about my religion and other religions, about cultures, not just my own, belief systems, ideas. It was during that time of self-study, Ed, that I discovered something that would actually save my faith. I discovered that Islam has its own tradition of independent thinking, of debate, dissent, discussion, and reinterpretation. It's known as ijthihad. I know that sounds eerily like jihad to non-Arab ears. And jihad, by the way, doesn't even mean violence. It has the connotation of that because of what we've read in headlines since 2001. But ijthihad is really about struggling with the mind in order to comprehend or grapple with the delicious complexity of the world that God has bequeathed to us. I learned that one can be a questioner as well as a devotee. That the two are not at loggerheads.</p>

	<p>That I could reconcile them. I could integrate them in my Muslim identity and integrate allowed me to have integrity, wholeness.</p> <p>Now that leads very nicely to my outlook, actually, on what it is to live in a pluralistic society. When I was studying at the public library, and because I discovered something I would have never learned in my Madrasa. A positive trait of my faith, ijtiḥād. I realized that this has to be the core of how I live. We Muslims are monotheists. We are to worship one God, not God’s self-appointed ambassadors, no matter what fancy titles they give themselves. This means that we have a religious duty, a spiritual duty, to contribute to societies in which we can disagree with one another in peace and with civility. Because anything less than that means that somebody is playing God and that we are allowing that person to play God. That is the central sin in Islam. So the beauty of applying ijtiḥād to my practice of Islam is that believing in one God obliges me to defend human liberty. It’s really from a place of faith, both in the elemental principles of Islam and in my fellow human beings, that I have written <i>Don’t Label Me</i>, whose subtitle is key: <i>How to Do Diversity Without Inflaming the Culture Wars</i>.</p>
<p><b>Question 2: Respond to the observation that you sound more like a Western European individualist and that you should be a mujtahid to employ ijtiḥād.</b> 11:05-12:22</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Very interesting indeed. It’s sometimes said in response to the kinds of claims you’re making now that you often sound more like a kind of Western European individualist in thinking about these matters. For example, you make the appeal to ijtiḥād and you say that’s part of Muslim tradition, but someone might say it’s also part of Muslim tradition that you must be a mujtahid in order to employ ijtiḥād. It’d be like a Supreme Court Justice. In principle, anybody can be a Supreme Court Justice, but you have to go through the training, you have to get a law degree, you have to know Constitutional law, you have to be trained in that way. So when you talk about ijtiḥād in what seems to be a kind of liberal way, it sounds like Western values are creeping in and that you call yourself a Muslim according to this account, but it’s more complicated and we’re seeing things that are really not part of Muslim tradition. I’m just wondering what you would say in response to that kind of observation.</p>
<p><b>Answer to Question 2: That assumes the West is contradictory to Islam, but in fact</b></p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Frankly, what I have said multiple times in response to that allegation is that it suggests that the West is contradictory to the faith of Islam itself. What people who make that accusation forget or don’t know is that Western civilization as we call it today was, in fact, saved by Muslims from the Dark Ages of Medieval Christianity. Not many people know the name Ibn Rushd. He was one of the great polymaths</p>

<p><b>the two are intertwined.</b> 12:22-14:29</p>	<p>within Islam, a theologian in his own right. He applied Aristotelian ethics to the practice of Islam. It was his preservation of Christian texts that would have otherwise been lost to marauders, his preservation of those texts. His translation of those texts into Arabic then allowed for Christians after the Middle Ages to adapt these ideas to their own faith. The point is this: that the West and Islam are not mutually exclusive. They are absolutely intertwined and one of the great fallacies of our day is that binaries, Black versus White, Islam versus the West, us versus them, somehow makes the world more clear, when in fact, binaries distort the, as I said earlier, delicious complexity of the world that's been bequeathed to us.</p>
<p><b>Question 3: What do you mean by honest versus dishonest diversity?</b> 14:29-15:01</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> That makes perfect sense. Let's come now to our central question for the evening, what is diversity anyway? Let's start with a distinction you draw in your book <i>Don't Label Me</i>. This is the distinction you repeat a number of times in the book, a distinction between what you call honest versus dishonest diversity. What do you mean by honest versus dishonest diversity?</p>
<p><b>Answer to Question 3: Dishonest diversity categorizes all sentient beings and leaves them in those categories. Honest diversity goes beyond labels, respecting diversity in point of view. It sees people as individuals. It digs deeper.</b> 15:01-19:22</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Right. Let me begin this way. I mentioned just a few minutes ago how binaries can distort reality and labels are part and parcel of that distortion. The way we human beings operate, if we are presented with a label, then we tend to sort of attach baggage to it. Anybody who doesn't fit neatly into that baggage is now seen as the other. We'll get more into that, but dishonest diversity thrives on labels and binaries. Dishonest diversity categorizes all sentient beings and then leaves them in those categories rather than using categories as a starting point for further discovery and for further exploration. Sadly, it is dishonest diversity, Ed, that I think is sweeping so much of the post-George Floyd moment in this country. When third- and fourth-graders, for example, are in some schools, by no means all, but some schools, being divided up, resegregated according to their complexion and then being told that because of your complexion, because you are white, you are powerful and because little Irshad is brown, she is powerless. Again, that's the baggage that goes with labels when reality is so much more complicated than that. That's dishonest diversity.</p> <p>Honest diversity moves beyond labels. It certainly takes them into account, but it also takes into account diversity of viewpoints. Why? Why is that important? Because even within groups, there will be differences of opinion. It is simply not the case that, if you have two Black people in a room, you've got the Black community covered. Or if</p>

	<p>you have three LGBTQ people in the room, you’ve got the queer community covered. Those individuals are exactly that—individuals. And they will, most likely, think differently on all kinds of issues. Which is why if we’re really interested in diversity, we’ve got to drill down past the group labels and ask, how does that person think? I can’t assume based on what I’ve labeled them. I’ve got to engage. So honest diversity takes into account diversity of viewpoints. It also encourages that even though our brains, being pattern-seeking organs, will throw labels onto one another, that that is not all there is to any given individual. That we are all so much more than meets the eye and that we ought to, when we care enough about an issue and we encounter somebody with whom we disagree, we ought to be willing to engage further. To hear where they’re coming from and that this is a matter of respect. Respect doesn’t mean to agree with somebody or even to be agreed with. Respect comes from the Latin, respectate. Respectate. I’m pointing to my glasses. Spectate means to look. Respectate means to look again, and that does mean asking questions, digging deeper, and transforming disagreement into opportunities for engagement, not opportunities to snap our fingers and walk away.</p>
<p><b>Question 4: Can you talk about honest diversity and the purity problem?</b> 19:22-20:11</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> At a very interesting and riveting point in your last book, you talk about how honest diversity has to face what you call the purity problem. The purity problem. And in the way of illustration, you talk about an event involving Black Lives Matter, an organizer of Black Lives Matter and a couple of members of Black Lives Matter, two of whom wanted to engage in a certain kind of conversation with the police as I’m recalling. Can you say a little bit about the details there and how that is an illustration of your point that honest diversity must face what you call the purity problem?</p>
<p><b>Answer to Question 4: Dishonest diversity reinforces us versus them. I’m hoping through the kind of work that I do that we can dissolve ourselves against</b></p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Honest diversity does face the purity problem. It’s dishonest diversity that tries to deny what the purity problem is and that it even exists. So let me explain by way of the story that you just introduced. When I was teaching leadership at New York University, this was now about eight years ago, a student of mine, a Black student of mine, had two other Black male friends. Those friends of his, one was named Edward, the other went by D. Edward and D had a dilemma. In speaking to my student about it, the student said, “You know who you really need to speak with is Professor Manji.” So I get this knock on my office door one afternoon. It’s Edward and D. They tell me who recommended them to come see me and they sit down and they said, “We need some advice. We are participating in Black Lives Matter.”</p>

**them and change  
the game.**

20:11-26:59

This was shortly after Trevon Martin’s death, murder. “We are happy to be at all of the protests, but we also want to find out what goes through the minds and the hearts of the cops when they’re lunging at a brother or they’re pulling the trigger.” And I said, “That’s great. You should find out.” They said, “Here’s the problem. We spoke to the local organizer about this, and she basically shut us down. She said that we were selling out our community by consorting with the enemy.” The reason these guys were talking to me is that they already had a suspicion that they weren’t selling out their community at all. That what they were was curious and solutions driven. They did not want to become, in their words now, and please forgive this language but I’m keeping it real. They did not want to become the “bitches of the brand” that is BLM. By that, they meant, we told the organizer. So we’re good enough to show up with our Black bodies, but apparently we can’t use our Black minds. What gives? And all she would say was that, in essence, you’re either with us, the community, or you’re sell-outs. That’s the kind of us against them dynamic, Ed, that too much of the diversity fear falls into. By wanting to seek out other viewpoints, by wanting to understand where the police were coming from, how they feel in moments of confrontation and tension, they wanted to educate the police that you see, here we are, wanting to understand you. Are you willing to do the same in trying to understand Black youth? It was a brilliant and sincere move on the part of these young men. But because they were told that you are not authentically Black and you’re not authentically in support of BLM if you seek other points of view, they had to make the choice. I advised them. First, did you ask the organizer what she meant by selling out the Black community? And they said, “No,” because they were so angry. I said, “Ask her. Start a conversation. Don’t assume that you understood her point. Maybe she has a point and in your own welter of emotions you’ve misinterpreted it. So start a conversation with her. Second, go talk to the cops. I mean, BLM calls itself a leaderless movement, so why are you seeking permission from an organizer? You’re individuals. Talk to the cops. Make sure that you come from a place of sincerity and not just strategy. But talk to them, for sure. And finally,” I said, “after you’ve done both, clarify the organizer’s intentions and have your conversations with the police. See what you learn from each of those experiences in order to bring the kind of leadership to BLM that stops this very legitimate pursuit of justice from calcifying into the pursuit of just us.” And what I meant by that was, see if you can figure out a way to persuade your fellow activist to bust out of us against them. Yes, I know. They’ll say, but we’re the ones who are being otherized by the police. And you can ask them, how does payback

	<p>amount to progress. I think, Ed, this is the big opportunity we're missing right now in our cultural moment. Us against them is often being opposed through tactics that scream us against them. It's like two rival teams on a field. Each of them wearing uniforms and then swapping out their uniforms. All they're doing is trading jerseys. One was called powerful. Now it wears the jersey of the powerless. One was called powerless. Now it wears the jersey of the powerful. All they're doing is trading uniforms. They're not changing the game. I'm hoping through the kind of work that I do, and that others are doing, make no mistake about that, that we can dissolve us against them and change the game.</p>
<p><b>Question 5: What is the ego brain and facing the reality of the ego brain all about?</b> 26:59-27:30</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> At various parts of the book, you say that the problem in some large sense for you is a kind of tendency toward tribalism. This tendency toward tribalism is a function of what you call the ego brain, perhaps drawing on some psychological theories in literature. What is that all about? The ego brain, facing the reality of the ego brain, and doing something about the reality of the ego brain?</p>
<p><b>Answer to Question 5: The ego brain considers it life-and-death when we are merely uncomfortable and triggers a flight, freeze, or flight situation. We usually choose to fight, and this includes times when we're simply being disagreed with.</b> 27:30-32:30</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Yes. This is very much rooted in neuroscience and social psychology. The psychology of why groups of people do what they do, hence social psychology. All of us who are born with a brain, and I don't mean that sarcastically, all of us who are born with a brain are born with a primitive part of the brain. That primitive part of the brain is the source of what psychologists call ego. Now of course our various attendees tonight have heard the word ego. Maybe some of them have heard it in a self-helpy kind of context or others in a more mystical context. But I'm talking purely from a scientific perspective here. The ego is that function of the brain that is constantly scanning for threats. This made sense, a lot of sense, 50, 70,000 years when our ancestors, hunter-gatherers, were out in the fields scavenging. Any rustle in the bush could have ended their lives. So no wonder evolution gifted us the ego. Its job is to keep us alive. Here's the problem. The ego is right once in a while, but most of the time, it's wrong. It confuses mere discomfort with mortal danger. If we're being disagreed with, for example, on something that we're passionate about, the ego senses your stress and it kicks into action and signals to you that you are in a life-and-death situation. So get ready to fight, freeze, or flee. Get the hell out of there. Most of us choose to fight during a disagreement. The reality is that we don't have to turn the disagreement into a fight. We can actually override the ego through some very simple techniques like breathing deeply, slowing down the blood rush, and allowing ourselves to</p>

	<p>transition from the primitive part of the brain to the more executive functioning part of the brain where emotion and reason can coexist. But, caught up in the moment, we lash back. That is why we as individuals have such a hard time exiting our ideological bubbles. It's just too easy because it's natural to get defensive. Imagine what happens. Well, you don't have to imagine. It's happening here in the United States only too often. What happens when a whole lot of individuals identify with this or that label, Democrat or Republican, progressive or conservative, AOC or MAGA, Black, White, socialist, capitalist. Individuals cling to those labels because the ego manipulates us into believing that we need to do that if we're going to survive. We need to be aware of this tendency. It's addictive, Ed. When we are validated, when our opinions are agreed with, we get a little burst of dopamine so miniscule we don't even realize it, but here's what we do know. We're not feeling any pain. And because we're not feeling any pain, we love the moment. And the more we crave it, the more we chase it. Again, utterly biological. The question is, do we have the willingness—we have the capacity, this much I can tell you—do we have the willingness, more of us, to tame our egos in order to listen to where others are coming from. I hope to explain just a little later on why it's worth the effort to listen to where others are coming from.</p>
<p><b>Question 6: Could you talk about your friend, Jim the Trump supporter?</b> 32:30-33:20</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Fascinating. Could you say a little bit in the way of illustration of some of these theoretical matters, say a little bit about your friend Jim the Trump supporter. To make it clear to everyone, you yourself are not a Trump supporter. Quite the contrary. You have been one who has been deeply critical of Trump and everything Trump represents, but you got to know this guy named Jim who was a Trump supporter.</p> <p><i>Manji:</i> And still is.</p> <p><i>Santurri:</i> You've got some very interesting chapters in your book about him and about your engagement with him and the engagement of him with other people who take a different point of view. Could you say something about Jim and how his history relates to some of the things you're talking about?</p>
<p><b>Answer to Question 6: Jim was blamed for being a homophobe because he was a</b></p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Right. Good old Jim. Not only is he a friend, Ed, but he has served as something of a father figure to me, believe it or not. I've known Jim going on 15 years now and we met in my Islamic reform days. I had a health crisis at one point and he was the first one to reach out. He was living in Los Angeles. I was living in New York. And he asked me, did I want him to hop a plane, come to New York, scoop me</p>

**Republican. He isn't at all a homophobe, but he was hurt by people who labeled him that and didn't care to talk to him about it. He felt driven to vote for Trump because of the vicious labeling people did.**  
33:20-39:04

up, and bring me back to his home that he shares with his wife and family so that I could be looked after. He's that kind of a guy. He's also an ardent Trump supporter. When I lived in Los Angeles, I was teaching at USC for a while, the University of Southern California. Jim and I would hang out a lot. And boy, would we ever have doozies of discussions. And, yes, sometimes also debates. But I came to appreciate something about Jim, that he wasn't irrational. He wasn't crazy for feeling resentful enough about the direction in which America was going to want to take a risk on voting for Donald Trump. I may have, again, disagreed with him, and boy, did I ever. But I needed to understand where he was coming from. One of the things I can tell you is that family friends of his had accused him, more than once, of being a quote/ unquote "homophobe" simply because of his Republican politics even prior to Trump. We know that he's not a homophobe. He practically adopted me, a queer Muslim, as his non-biological daughter. He just couldn't let go of this label that he was given not once, not twice, but multiple times. What he explained to me is that he felt demeaned in three consecutive ways. First, that people who had decided that they knew conservatism better than he did. They took their assumptions about Jim and just concluded that he must be a homophobe. Then they tried to guilt him into apologizing for something that he wasn't. Finally, they never cared to actually engage him in a conversation, either about LGBTQ humanity or about homophobia. And as I say, this is more than once that he experienced this. The more he came to realize that this was happening not just to him, but to fellow Republicans, fellow conservatives, he decided that the only way he can fight for his humanity, for his dignity, is by voting for a guy who apparently defends the dignity of the Jim's of our world.

I would argue that he never needed to be treated the way he was by the people who labeled him a homophobe. And imagine that if they actually cared to engage with him, to hear not just where he stands on, let's say, marriage equality, which incidentally, he was and is in favor of, but also where he stands on all kinds of issues and how he came to those positions. If they cared enough to engage him, I'm not so sure that he would have been driven to cast his vote for as inflammatory a character as Trump. So one of the reasons I explain in *Don't Label Me* that we ought not to be labeling people and just leaving them in those categories, again, we can use labels as starting points, not finish lines. One of the reasons we ought not to do the labeling and fixing of people and freezing them in time and fixing them in place is that our own tendency as human beings to humiliate the other, yes even when we're progressive. Sometimes, especially when we're progressive, we can

	<p>radicalize. And if we really care about contributing to the causes that we say we stand for, then we’ve also got to scrutinize the impact that our methods are having on people whom we claim need to change their minds.</p>
<p><b>Question 7: Did you ever experience disappointment at Jim’s political choices? How would you respond to a person who said, “If you voted for Donald Trump, you are immoral.”?</b> 39:04-40:39</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> In any moment in your relationship with Jim, it must have been a difficult relationship to navigate in a way. Certainly you appreciate him for what he did for you. But at any moment did you ever sit back and say, I just can’t understand why you have the views that you have? Let me tell you what prompts this question somewhat. Right after the 2016 election, there was a gathering here at this college where a number of faculty and staff gave a kind of a reaction testimony of sorts after the election in the college chapel. One person stood up and said to the community, “If you voted for Trump, you are immoral.” Now, number one, did you ever have any such reaction to Jim in any variation, any degree, of that sort? At the very least, deep disappointment at how he expressed himself politically? And then secondly, what would you say in response to that person at St. Olaf who stood up and said to the community, and some in the community did vote for Donald Trump, of course, “If you voted for Donald Trump, you are immoral.”</p>
<p><b>Answer to Question 7: I have felt disappointed in Jim but didn’t put him down because of it and we were able to understand each other. For the individual who called Trump supporters immoral, I would ask them questions and hope that they would see that they accomplish nothing by just</b></p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Let me start with the second part of your question first. I would say to that individual, and I would not lecture that individual because I know that I would not get a fair hearing if I did to that individual what he or she has done to Trump voters. So first of all, I would be self-aware enough to bust out of us against them as I try to get a fair hearing from that person. I would ask that individual to tell me more about why he or she believes that it will make any kind of a difference to label the people with whom they disagree as immoral. What do you hope you’re accomplishing? And do you think you are accomplishing what you hope for by throwing out a label like that? So I would start with questions. My aspiration is that that person, in a conversation with me, would discover that, first of all, that I’ve role modeled a way of disagreeing without needlessly making somebody defensive, number one. But number two, I would hope that they see that in stereotyping a whole swath of people based on their own perception of why those people voted a certain way rather than asking what led any of these people to cast a vote for Donald Trump, by stereotyping, they are giving those people exactly the evidence that such people may need to justify their vote.</p>

<p><b>throwing out a label like that.</b> 40:39-46:19</p>	<p>Now to the first part of your question. Did I ever feel disappointed in Jim? Oh, my goodness. More than once. And I’ve said so. But I never said, “Jim, you are X or you are Y.” What I’ve said was, “I must confess, I feel disappointed and I don’t know that I’m in a position right now to hear you in the way that I know you’d like to be heard, so I need to step back. I need to take a break from this conversation, and let’s pick it up at some point down the road.” There was one time, and I described it in the book, where I snapped. Jim was going on and on about how Barack Obama is leaving this country more racially fractured than ever. I asked him, “Does that mean that American history begins after the genocide of Native Americans? Because that’s part of American history and let’s talk about racial fracture there.” He gave me a stink eye and kind of just stewed in the moment. Then he went back to castigating Obama. At that point, of course he launched into something about Black-on-Black violence. At that point, I said, “Okay, Jim. I’m going to ask you to do something. You have your iPad in front of you. I want you to Google “My Brother’s Keeper.” He didn’t know what that was. I said, just Google it, read, and let’s talk. And <a href="#">My Brother’s Keeper</a> is an organization that Barack Obama founded during his presidency, which teaches young Black men to take responsibility for their lives. Exactly the values that Jim, as a conservative, embraces. So I didn’t reel off statistics. I didn’t throw a pile of data at him. Because, again, cold hard facts are exactly that. They are cold. They do not touch the heart. And because we human beings think emotionally, first and foremost, if we’re going to have an impact, we’ve got to touch the heart in order to build trust. When Jim saw the website and what it said about My Brother’s Keeper, he told me—he actually didn’t realize that this was also a part of President Obama’s legacy. The next day, he said to me that he was really impacted by what we had discussed and he thanked me for bringing this to his attention. Did that change his politics? No. And I wasn’t there to change his politics. He’s allowed to have the politics that he has. I simply wanted to humanize, not just President Obama, but also those of us who do vote for somebody like that. And Jim got the point.</p>
<p><b>Question 8: Would you like to talk more about how you put these ideas into practical play or talk more about where you’re</b></p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Thank you. In a few minutes, I think we’re going to turn to general Q&amp;A, but before we do that, I’m wondering, Irshad, is there anything you’d like to say to convey with greater concreteness, perhaps, than you’ve had the opportunity up to now, what you’re up to these days in putting these ideas into practical play or talking more on the theoretical level about where you’re coming from on matters of diversity?</p>

<p><b>coming from on matters of diversity?</b> 46:19-46:52</p>	
<p><b>Answer to Question 8: We face many existential challenges these days. The next generation needs to learn to communicate along lines of difference and disagreement or the needle of planetary repair will not move. Dogma will chase dogma when dogma is the problem.</b> 46:52-49:51</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> I actually thank you for inviting me to say a little bit about the practicality of teaching these ideas. I feel very strongly, Ed, about the need to bring these ideas to a new generation and here’s why. As many of us will agree, we’re all facing existential challenges these days. Of course, first and foremost, I’m referring to what I do think is a climate crisis. But even if you don’t believe it’s a crisis, there’s something weird going on with our climate. It may very well imperil our survival as a planet and as a human race. I’m also thinking of mass migration exacerbated by global weirding, as one scientist calls it. Not just global warming, but global weirding, witness Texas. There are also big questions around the unintended consequences of artificial intelligence, automation, and what that will mean for human relationships and indeed, how we perceive our own humanity and each other’s. All of these and more are highly emotional issues. If this next generation, the one that’s at university now, that’s even at high school and middle school right now, if they only learn to replicate our stale mistakes of barking past each other, and if they don’t learn how to effectively communicate across lines of difference and even disagreement, then I do worry that the needle of planetary repair will not move. Because it will be yet more us against them. One side will come up with solutions that suit its ideological lens only to have that overturned when the other side is in power and come up with solutions that fit its ideological lens, and back and forth we go. In other words, barking past each other is no recipe for enduring solutions. We’ve got to learn to grapple with diverse viewpoints, otherwise the cynicism will deepen, the noise will amplify, and the only thing that will move is not the needle of progress, but what I call the hamster wheel of dogma with one dogma being replaced by another being replaced by another, when dogma itself is the problem.</p>
<p><b>Audience Question 1: How does your commentary on the ego change when dealing with social media and corporations?</b></p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Thank you, Irshad. Now let’s turn to some questions that are coming to us online from the general audience. This one is from Evan Strong, the Class of 2022, from St. Olaf College. How does your commentary on the ego and our capacity to overpower it change when social media algorithms and corporations come into the conversation? Is there a possibility for dismantling the us/ them binary on our current digital platforms?</p>

49:51-50:29	
<p><b>Answer to Audience</b>  <b>Question 1: Social media is a huge challenge for those who want to dissolve us against them. Try asking people questions from a sincere place about their point of view, and let them have the last word. These and other techniques are in <i>Don't Label Me</i>. Try them and let me know how they work. The goal is to humanize yourself to them, not change their mind.</b>  50:29-55:54</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> You have captured, my friend, a struggle that I have every day as I log on to my social feeds. But I'll give you some good news and some hope in just a moment. Let me first acknowledge social media is a huge challenge for those of us who want to dissolve us against them. These are platforms that are deliberately designed to amp up our emotions and we are coming up against armies of engineers and designers if we want to bust out of the prison that is win/lose. However, I can tell you that in the way that I typically use social media, I first of all tell folks, here's a question I have for you. And I ask out of sincerity, not out of sarcasm. So I make a very clear point of letting them know what my intentions are. My intentions are pure. They are led by curiosity, not by judgement. Secondly, when somebody I'm disagreeing with on social does respond and they're snarky, I again thank them for their time and I remind them that I'm genuinely curious and that I hope that we can lower the temperature because I have something to learn from them. I'm not here to teach; I'm here to learn. I then ask my next question. Whatever the response, and often, actually, by round two, I do get very good and helpful responses. Also by round two, emotional defenses have lowered and the person with whom I'm engaging now realizes, oh, she's serious. She's actually not just playing me and she's not trying to tweak me. So this is something that I can take seriously. By the end of round two, I then say to that person, thank you again for taking the time to discuss this with me. On balance, I still disagree, but I now understand your values and I'm going to think about them as I ruminate on my own position. If you'd like, please take the last word. And I give them the last word, and I stick to it. No matter what they say in response, I do not respond. They get the final word.</p> <p>So, you see, there are ways that each of us can comport ourselves on social media to both stand our ground and seek common ground. Now, that's kind of an odd phrase. Stand your ground and seek common ground? It's not a contradiction. Here's why. Standing your ground is about what you believe. Seeking common ground is about how you express what you believe. And if you can leave the other person feeling respected, that you've viewed them through new eyes, not just judged them by dint of the first impression you've gotten, if you can leave them feeling respected, they, I guarantee you, in their off-script moments, when they don't have to echo their side, in their private moments, they'll also be thinking about what you said to them. They'll also be reflecting on the point of view that you've expressed. I know this because it's happened on any numbers of occasions and not just on</p>

	<p>social media, but even in person. Pre-pandemic, of course, when I was advocating for Muslim reform. Try some of those techniques. By the way, I articulate all of these techniques and more in <i>Don't Label Me</i>. But please do try them and if you're so inclined, let me know how they worked for you. Also one final thing about this is how they worked for you a bit. The whole point of this is not to change somebody else's mind. It is, again, to humanize yourself to them so that the next time they encounter somebody who takes your position, they'll remember the respect that you gave them and they'll be less inclined to write off or simply dismiss or demonize others who also take the positions that you do. If you happen to change their mind, bonus. But that's not what it means for this to work.</p>
<p><b>Audience Question 2: How do you reconcile Richard Spencer's rejection of diversity with your own? Do you consider your idea of diversity inclusionary? What do you think of the paradox of tolerance?</b> 55:54-56:49</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Thank you, Irshad. Question from a current St. Olaf student.</p> <p><i>Fricka Lindemann:</i> Hi. My name is Fricka Lindemann. I'm a junior and I'm a participant in the Public Affairs Conversation program. My question concerns an excerpt from your book <i>Don't Label Me</i> in which you talk about Richard Spencer. Richard Spencer is the racist, sexist, and homophobic front man of the alt right, and you say that it would only be a disservice to our idea of diversity if we didn't grant him the right to speak on a stage. You say that you find many of his ideas appalling and you are not on the fence about them, but still the only thing that would serve our idea of diversity would be to still have him. How do you reconcile his rejection of diversity with your own? Would you consider your idea of diversity an inclusionary one and also what do you make of the paradox of tolerance? Thank you.</p>
<p><b>Answer to Audience Question 2:</b> 56:49-1:01:07</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Thank you and I've thought long and hard about this. Richard Spencer is a white nationalist, and as the questioner says, he's racist, sexist, homophobic. He has been on record as being pretty restrictive in his views on all of these issues. But I do believe that anybody who supports diversity, honest diversity, needs to grant him a stage. Why? First because honest diversity incorporates different points of view. That's what makes it honest. Second, because when we, any of us, whether we're on the left or on the right or somewhere in between, when we tell others, you can't say that, all we are doing is giving them the ammo to dig in their heels and to become even more defensive and more committed to saying exactly what we wish they wouldn't. That's because no one wants to be pushed around. Nobody wants to be bullied. Think about it from your own perspective. If somebody says to you, "You can't be progressive. You're not allowed. That's just not tolerated</p>

	<p>in this church,” let’s say. Would you think about leaving the church? Probably. Just as I did think about leaving Islam. I’m not sure that you’d be motivated, as I was, to read more about where the church stands on this or that. Because in this culture of instant gratification, once you’re told no, it’s easy to simply react. Both from a place of integrity, if you really believe in honest diversity, and from a place of strategy, there’s no need to strip somebody else of their voice. What you can say, instead of racist, sexist, anti-gay, Richard Spencer, go away. What you can say instead is, racist, sexist, anti-gay, Richard Spencer, have your say. You’ve made clear in that chant what you think of his positions. You’ve been very strong and very transparent that you do not buy into his ideology. So you’re not complicit with it. But that if you prevent him from having his say, then the very diversity that you believe you’re supporting because of your positions for gay and lesbian rights, for racial justice, for gender equality, your diversity in shutting down his viewpoint will come off as a scam and a sham. And that, unfortunately, is the reputation that diversity and inclusion have with all kinds of people today precisely because we’re not willing to hear them out. In other words, we practice exclusion in the name of inclusion. Do you see how we then get defined as hypocrites? In essence, because we’re behaving like hypocrites.</p>
<p><b>Audience Question 3: Are you hesitant to identify an actual truth, or are you open to debate about certain values you hold?</b> 1:01:07-1:02:13</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Thank you, Irshad. Now a question from Markian Romanyshyn who is St. Olaf Class of 2023. He’s from Washington State. And here it is. In your first remarks, you noted that wherever dissent is not allowed, and perhaps you implied wherever dissent is not embraced, someone is playing God. Is it fair to assume that you would be hesitant to identify the, as in a real and actual truth, or alternatively, are there certain ideas you deem universal and indeed, real and actual truths? For example, you’ve mentioned the value of individual freedom. Would attributing realness and actuality to the value of individual freedom be in tension with some of your other views or perhaps would you, on principal, be open to a debate about the value of individual freedom even at a time when individual freedoms are hanging in the balance? There’s a lot going on there, but good luck, Irshad.</p>
<p><b>Answer to Audience Question 3: Yes they’re in tension and yes I’m open to debate. But</b></p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Okay. I love it. Thank you. The answer is yes. They are in tension, these two things. And yes, I would be more than open to a debate about them. You know why? Because even though I love the idea of individual liberty, freedom of conscience, pluralism of ideas, and universality of human rights, I love all of these principles, but I don’t know that they are unassailable. If I’m going to be asking others to</p>

<p><b>what you believe and how you express it are two different things. If I want a fair hearing of my beliefs, I first give others a fair hearing of their beliefs.</b> 1:02:13-1:05:08</p>	<p>exhibit some humility as they engage with those with whom they disagree, how can I fail to do the same? How can I not be open to having my core beliefs challenged? Now, how they are challenged is another story. I will tell you that there have been no dearth of self-described, self-righteous atheists who have tried to convince me that I'm really not a Muslim. What I am is a closeted atheist. And you know, I should just come clean about that. I'm open to hearing that. What I'm not open to is being bullied about it. And I can't begin to tell you how often the most missionary zeal that I've encountered, the most pushiness, the most arrogance that I've encountered comes from those who declare their godlessness. Again, perfectly fine to be godless. It's absolutely your right. What is not your right is to corner me and not let me go until I accede to your demands. So again, folks, what you believe and how you express what you believe are two different things. And if you wish for other people to give you a fair hearing, the most reliable way to have that happen is to go first in giving them a fair hearing. I say that to all of the missionaries, religious and secular, out there.</p>
<p><b>Audience Question 4: Would you only use positive labels or should negative labels exist for educational conversation?</b> 1:05:08-1:05:39</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Thank you, Irshad. Another question now from a current St. Olaf student.</p> <p><i>Julie Stagg:</i> Good evening and thank you for talking to us about diversity. My name is Julie Stagg. I'm a junior and the course I'm currently taking on behalf of this event is PACON 281 and my question is we are encouraged to look past labels due to baggage. Would you encourage only positive labels, or should negative labels exist purely for educational conversation? Thank you.</p>
<p><b>Answer to Audience Question 4: Negative labels do exist. The question is, are we willing to go beyond that label and engage if we feel particularly committed to the issue at hand?</b> 1:05:39-1:09:17</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Should negative labels exist if only for educational purposes? Here are the facts. They do exist, negative labels, and they will always exist. Because, as I've alluded to earlier, the brain is a pattern-seeking organ and it's also, to be blunt, a fairly lazy organ. It's not all that smart, the primitive part of it, that is. Our brains can't handle processing deeply all of the bits and bytes and shards of information that come our way every day. So the brain resorts to shortcuts. I'm looking at you through a computer. I have a phone in my hand. Notice I've labeled three things already, right? A computer, a phone, a hand. Here, though, is the difference between labeling an item and labeling sentient beings. Items are inert. They don't change unless we use them for different functions. They are static. Sentient beings are not static. We evolve. We are dynamic. We move forward and we move backward. And I don't just mean physically. I mean emotionally, psychologically, morally. We</p>

	<p>make mistakes. We grow. We relapse. The point is that any label that you slap on an individual, be it a positive label or a negative one, will never fully capture what they are. Even a set of labels will never fully capture all that we are. So I'm not going to sit here and say negative labels should not exist. They do. The question is, are we willing, once our brains tell us that this is the negative label we ought to put on this sentient being, are we willing, is there a reason for us to go beyond that label and engage if we feel particularly committed to the issue at hand? Remember, you can't do this with everyone. There's only 24 hours in a day and some of us need their beauty sleep more than others. So you can't engage with every single person as deeply as I'm suggesting. What I'm suggesting is, in any given chapter of your life, seek out one person who takes a very different position, even an offensive position, on something you care desperately about, and get to know them. See where they're coming from and play this game with yourself. Figure out, now that you know their values, can you reframe your position in a way that speaks to their values and give that position a fighting shot of being heard by them?</p>
<p><b>Audience Question 5: Is the American two-party system detrimental to social progress?</b> 1:09:17-1:09:39</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Thank you, Irshad. Now a question from Zachary Holmes, who is a St. Olaf student, Class of 2023, from Falls Church, Virginia. Given your thoughts on binaries, what are your thoughts on the American two-party system? Do you believe it is detrimental to social progress?</p>
<p><b>Answer to Audience Question 5: Yes, it is. It is taking the place of religion that has grace, and it has no grace.</b> 1:09:39-1:14:41</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> I do. There are people who say that even worse than the two-party system is the fact, in their minds, that the two parties aren't all that different from each other. They both resort to big money. They both cater to special interests. And so on and so forth. I do think that the two parties, at this moment in our history, are sufficiently different that there is a clear choice for people. But I can also testify that there are a whole lot of Americans who feel politically homeless because their values are not represented by either one of these parties. It will be exceptionally difficult to start a third or a fourth party. It may happen. I hope it does. Who knows? The Republican Party may actually be in the midst of imploding. We don't know yet. And for that matter, after four years of being in power, Democrats might also implode. We don't know yet. The point is this: that we need to remember politics is all about power. Therefore, parties will resort to whatever they need to in order to get power and that does include courting millionaires and multimillionaires</p>

	<p>and indeed billionaires. Their job is to have their members elected. So they operate in a win/lose paradigm, political parties do. This is why it is so toxic to the public square for politics to be taken as a lifestyle. It's so, so corrosive to adopt a win/lose game as if that's how we ought to conduct our lives. Politics, yes, we conduct it that way. Sports, yes, we conduct it that way. But life poses so many more choices that can be win/win rather than win/lose. And one of the things I really lament about the time we're living in is that organized religion, of which I have never been a fan, by the way, organized religion, but here's my defense: organized religion is on the wane. Many more young people are defining themselves as spiritual, not religious. And boy, do I ever get it. Respect. Mad respect for those who do this. But the void that is left by religion is now being filled by politics. And politics itself is becoming a religion. You see? Just because Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and other big religious persuasions are plummeting in popularity does not mean that religion is going away. It just means that religions that offer grace are being replaced by political religions that offer no grace. That could be QAnon, the cult thereof, and it can be woke-ism, the cult thereof. So if you can be spiritual without being religious, I applaud you. But what that should mean, then, or what I hope it will mean, is that you will offer grace, non-judgement, about who deserves and doesn't deserve your compassion. We're all coming from a particular place, a particular backstory. We all have experiences that shape where we stand on this or that issue. If you have enough grace to get to know somebody's backstory and to ask them more questions about it, not gotcha questions, but sincere questions from a place of curiosity and not judgement, that is spirituality. If you're going to merely judge, that, my friends, is religion, even if it just goes by a different name.</p>
<p><b>Audience Question 6:</b> 1:14:41-1:15:26</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Thank you, Irshad. Now I'm going to take a couple of questions from the larger community. One from Theodora from St. Paul and another from Robert from Gurney, Illinois, because they're both on the same topic generally. Theodora's question: Do you think it was the right move for Twitter to ban Trump? Why or why not? And then a related question, again from Robert from Gurney, Illinois: What could or should the major social media platforms, Twitter, Facebook, et cetera, be doing or not doing to help with our current political polarization? How do these private companies that have so much power enact moral courage? That's a tough one.</p>

<p><b>Answer to Audience Question 6:</b> 1:15:26-1:19:19</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> That’s a really tough one. Let me begin with Theodora’s question. Was Jack Dorsey right to ban Trump from Twitter? I got to tell you, Theodora, I’m of mixed minds about this. It’s not because I think Trump is just another voice. Of course, he’s not. The man abuses his freedom of speech. He constantly lies. He constantly exaggerates. He whips people up and there’s never a retraction or a correction. This is his MO. It’s gaslighting. I’m not saying no other politician does it. Many do. But this man is a particular master of gaslighting, okay? So let me be clear. What he does with his freedom of speech is, to me, abominable. Having said that, on the one hand, I’m actually glad that he’s banned from Twitter because the sphere, the cultural sphere in which we’re operating, all of us right now, is so high-intensity that when Trump tweets, it’s like yelling fire in a crowded theater. He knows exactly what he’s doing. Well, yelling fire in a crowded theater is unconstitutional. It goes too far. Now, you can take issue with my analogy that it’s like yelling fire in a crowded theater, and I certainly appreciate that. But that’s what one side of me says.</p> <p>The other side of me says, by stripping him of his Twitter platform, Jack Dorsey has given him yet another reason to claim he’s a martyr. It’s when so-called liberal institutions, of which tech is always considered a part, impinge on the rights of conservatives or populists, in Trump’s case, to have their say, that is when their cult becomes even more powerful. And I must tell you, I’m deeply worried that these sorts of moves will mean that he or somebody like him is reelected in 2024. Precisely because his base can claim that much more victimhood. So, as with everything, actions have consequences. We just don’t yet know what the consequences of this particular action will be. For now, I’m reveling in the calm, relative calm, that comes from not having Trump tweet. But I am somewhat anxious about how that will be used and manipulated to give him or somebody like him an even bigger voice in the coming months and years.</p>
<p><b>Follow-up to Audience Question 6: Are you concerned about the power of big tech to make these kinds of judgements unilaterally?</b></p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Irshad, if I could just follow up on that a bit, are you at all concerned—this is a kind of Orwellian concern that I’m expressing here now—are you at all concerned about the power of big tech to be making these kinds of judgements unilaterally independently in some sense from the democratic process. Particularly when big tech is often characterized as having a particular kind of ideological disposition?</p>

<p>1:19:19-1:19:53</p>	
<p><b>Answer to Follow-up to Audience Question 6: Yes I am. If you have an idea, get in touch with me.</b> 1:19:53-1:20:59</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Of course I am, Ed. Of course I am. I know that there are lots of smart thinkers out there, digital visionaries, academic and otherwise, who have ideas about what tech giants ought to be doing to sincerely commit to the public square. Not just rhetorically, but sincerely. I have yet to hear an idea that I can get behind. But here’s an invitation, it’s not a challenge, but an invitation, to the attendees tonight. If there’s any particular idea that you think would be worth experimenting with, get in touch with me. Email me <a href="mailto:team@moralcourage.com">team@moralcourage.com</a> or get in touch, yes, via social media. But the point is, I will look into it if you recommend it.</p>
<p><b>Audience Question 7: How can we promote honest diversity without promulgating fake news?</b> 1:20:59-1:21:46</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Thank you. This question now from Elise Stechen who is an alum of the college, Class of 2018, hello, Elise. She was a student of mine at one point and a student in the Public Affairs Conversation. She’s writing from Arvada, Colorado. She had actually three questions, but we’re going to take the third one, because the first two are somewhat long and we’re running out of time. Here’s what she asks. How can we promote honest diversity without promulgating fake news or can be too willing to hear others, which would lead to wider dispersion of fake news and false beliefs?</p>
<p><b>Answer to Audience Question 7:</b> 1:21:46-1:24:51</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> I don’t think that honest diversity will either exacerbate or curb the distribution of fake news. That has a dynamic of its own. That has a momentum of its own. What you’re doing by hearing somebody out is you’re giving them enough room to feel heard so that they, then, will hear you out. When it’s your turn to engage, again, how you express your disbelief about the facts that they have tabled will make all the difference to whether they’re willing to hear more from you. So rather than saying something along the lines of, “Are you serious? You know that’s BS.” Or, “Do you realize what you’re actually saying?” Those sorts of questions come from a place of judgement. Instead, be savvy. Ask them to tell you more. Ask them to tell you more about how they know that this is true. Because you’re genuinely interested. And by the way, you ought to be interested. Who knows? Maybe you can learn something from them. Not every conspiracy theory is false. Most are. But some conspiracies prove to be true, and you won’t know until you readily engage, right? Now again, questioner, you have to be deeply committed to the issue at hand. You can’t go around doing this with everybody. And I’m not saying that you should. Some things you don’t have time for, and I get that. So thank them for their time and get on with your life. But thank them. Whatever it is you are committed to,</p>

	<p>make the time to ask expansive questions. Tell me more. Help me understand. Share with me what it is that I'm missing about where you're coming from. When you can ask for their help in teaching you what they think you need to know, their emotional defenses will lower so that you can then express where you differ with them and why. But go first in the listening department. That is your surest way to then push back on the misinformation that has been expressed to you.</p>
<p><b>Question 9: Why are you not entirely happy with what goes on under the name of intersectionality in the academy?</b> 1:24:51-1:26:08</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Thank you, Irshad. I'm thinking it'd be really interesting to get your reaction to some things that are happening these days in the academy particularly and some things that leap out from the book with that larger concern in mind in our last few minutes. In a number of places in the book, you say that the problem with labeling is that we're all plurals. That is to say, we are complex individuals and there's something abstract and unreal about categorizing us in the way that we often get categorized. You say that in the academy, the academy's attempt at pluralism, you say, is given in intersectionality. That's not surprising that you would say that. But then you go on to suggest that you're not entirely happy with what goes on under the name of intersectionality in the academy. I'm not sure I understood entirely what you were about on this. What is your position, finally, on this pattern?</p>
<p><b>Answer to Question 9: Intersectionality does not allow for growth, which is why I choose pluralism over intersectionality.</b> 1:26:08-1:30:28</p>	<p><i>Manji:</i> Yeah. Clarify, Manji, clarify. Don't give me all this gobbledygook about critical race theory. So here is the bottom line. Intersectionality, which is part of postmodernism and critical race theory, intersectionality locates people at certain intersections. For example, I am located at the intersection of queer Muslim woman. Person of color as well. The problem with this approach to analyzing the world, never mind understanding human beings, is that we do not live at intersections. We move through intersections as human beings. We don't just stay in one place. We do and we dream and far more, I think, accurate to where we live than intersections is, we live in pastures. We live on hillsides. We live in meadows where there's plenty of room to become more than we already are. Because all of us have aspirations. All of us have dreams. But if we are told, particularly in our formative years at university, that you live on a grid where we can literally map out who you are, and therefore what you're about, because you are found at this particular intersection, then it's easy to assume that that is what we are. So we may as well identify with the tribes, with the queer tribe, the Muslim tribe, the BIPOC tribe, the #metoo tribe, because after all, that's what I am. You're that, but you're so much more. Maybe it goes back to my faith, but precisely because I do think that the universe,</p>

	<p>and you can call it God or you can call it nature or you can call it the universe, but precisely because the universe is so creative, it does not produce widgets. It does not manufacture robots. It gives life to sentience and to consciousness and that means we are fluid. We're something today and something else besides that tomorrow. That is what it means to grow. Intersectionality discourages growth. Pluralism states that any position I take today is provisional, contingent, on having more experiences in life and hearing better arguments down the road. So by all means, today I can decide that something is right or wrong, but I give myself the room to grow into a different position later on. Intersectionality doesn't allow for that kind of evolution. What you are today is what you shall always be. Pluralism allows you to be today what you are and allows you to grow and add to what you are as you become. That is why I choose pluralism over intersectionality.</p>
<p><b>Closing Comments:</b> 1:30:28-1:32:10</p>	<p><i>Santurri:</i> Thank you, Irshad. That gives us quite a bit to discuss and reflect on. But we've come now to the end of our time. Thanks to the audience for joining us tonight in this stimulating exchange with Irshad Manji, founder of Moral Courage College and prolific author. And thanks so much to you, Irshad, for being with us and for sharing with us your compelling history and ideas about diversity.</p> <p><i>Manji:</i> Thank you so much, Ed. It was a real pleasure. And I look forward, by the way, to the rest of the speakers in this fascinating series that the Institute has launched this spring.</p> <p><i>Santurri:</i> Thank you. The St. Olaf Institute for Freedom and Community continues its series of public events on diversity, freedom, and community this spring term. The next event in this series is with former <i>New York Times</i> columnist, Bari Weiss, on anti-Semitism and liberal freedom. That event is on March 11. This spring term, the Institute is also sponsoring a theory of events on the theme America After Trump. The first event of that series will be on March 4 with world-renowned Harvard philosopher, Michael Sandel on the topic The Populist Revolt, Merit, and the Common Good. Learn more about these events at <a href="http://institute.stolaf.edu">institute.stolaf.edu</a>. We hope you can join us. For now, good night, be safe, and be well.</p>