



Episode 1,272: Gene Epstein on How to Debate a Socialist

Guest: Gene Epstein

WOODS: Listen, your debate on socialism versus capitalism at the Soho Forum really, really has to be seen to be believed. People have got to watch this. I will link to the video. There's also audio, podcast audio, but who wants that? You want to see this. I'm going to link to it at TomWoods.com/1272. Because what you did in this debate really surprised me, and it obviously surprised your fellow debater, because you did not adopt the typical line of arguments that somebody might have made in a debate against socialism. And I was left very, very shocked and favorably impressed, because I thought probably your opponent Bhaskar — what's his last name?

EPSTEIN: Sunkara.

WOODS: Sunkara — I think I probably would have made the kinds of arguments that he surely was prepped for, which is, you know, capitalism has created a lot of wealth and the poor have been lifted from poverty and things like that. I mean, I would have done all kinds of stuff on that. And not to say that those points aren't correct, but surely, he was prepped and ready for and expecting you to say those very things. You didn't. And now, incidentally, it's not going to spoil the debate if you tell people to tack you took, because they need to see it. I mean, they really need to see it.

EPSTEIN: You know, Tom, I'm often aware of podcast discussions, where I'm talking to a number of people who are listening to your podcast who saw the debate, a lot of people who didn't, and I want to make sure that the people who didn't are oriented. And if I've spoiled it, and you don't want to see it, fine, but I want to explain to you people what happened and how it went. And indeed, let me just remind you of one thing. Of course I had a weird experience with Bhaskar. Initially the resolution was supposed to be that the one is better than the other in terms of freedom and prosperity. But then two weeks before the debate, he sends me a note at 4:30 in the morning, somehow declaring that — he tells me: I've told you a couple of times I can't defend prosperity.

WOODS: Oh!

EPSTEIN: And I didn't know what that meant. And he sent it to me at 4:30 in the morning. I know he's been under pressure; he had some issues going on with his professional life, which are worth mentioning and interesting. But I thought, well, I don't know what's going on with the guy, will he show up. So I wrote him that morning and say, okay, okay, we will cut prosperity out, and it will only be about freedom. Socialism is more effective than capitalism in bringing freedom to the masses.

WOODS: Oh, okay.

EPSTEIN: That's one thing. But of course, I knew he would probably bring in some economic issues, anyway, sneak them in, as indeed he did. But in a way, I felt, well, for 80 minutes of focus, probably freedom is worth it as a standalone concept. So that's the reason why, by and large, when he mentioned economic issues, I pretty much didn't pick up on them, because I felt like we're supposed to be debating the issue of freedom, and let's stick to that. So that's one point.

But with that said, certainly the argument I made — which is that you can achieve your socialist values far more effectively within the context of capitalism. If you simply play the capitalist game, you have immense potential to achieve a much better form of socialism. That I think is the argument that you are talking about, Tom, that you didn't anticipate. Is that —

WOODS: Yeah, it is, but I think partly the reason I didn't anticipate it is I had seen the original resolution, and I just hadn't — I mean, maybe — because I was on a cruise ship, actually, when I watched the debate, so I may have skipped over where they restated the resolution, and so I was expecting you to hit the prosperity side of things.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, it actually — you know, in retrospect — of course, the prosperity side is easily done. And indeed, certainly the same argument, which is that, you know, Bhaskar at one point said we could have 5% growth under socialism, and Gene, you'll be stuck with 3.5% growth. And indeed, the typical argument really is, of course, that they can achieve greater prosperity. And I would say, look, if you think that workers are much better motivated when everybody gets paid the same and when it's all a democratically run, then obviously, do it. Then achieve the socialist dream. Just have worker ownership, interconnected firms.

And then I mentioned of course the obvious statistics that are easily checked. Usually people are surprised to learn the obvious point, really, that the distribution of consumer spending is much narrower than the distribution of the income, because obviously, rich people spend a lot of their money on taxes and philanthropy and investment, and they consume far less of it. The numbers I trotted out to him, which are easily checked, is that the bottom half of income receivers account for one-third of all consumption, the bottom four-fifths account for nearly two-thirds. And then there are other numbers to cite, that labor union pension funds command over \$3.2 trillion worth of investment funds. Worldwide, the labor unions have over 40 trillion. So there's plenty of wherewithal to buy up firms, to boycott firms, to do whatever you want to do within the context of capitalism to create a socialist subeconomy. And that was the main thing that I presented to Bhaskar.

And, you know, one other point is that I almost would have preferred that he'd be better prepared. But he was acting in such a flaky way that I was almost afraid he wouldn't show up at the debate, just the fact that he changed the resolution. By the way, I'll tell you another funny thing. When I initially wrote him, I said we can take it either way, that capitalism is far more effective with respect to freedom and prosperity, socialism is far more effective. I'll give you your choice. Do you want to take the affirmative and go first or whatever? He writes me back this polite no, and then he says: yeah, I'd like to say it's more effective, but could you take out the "far more" effective?

WOODS: Wow.

EPSTEIN: I said okay, sure, it's not far more, it's just more effective. So I thought, you know, he's got a little bit of fear. You know, he wants to take that word, and then I get the note about that he can't defend prosperity. And then on top of that, he did virtually nothing to promote the debate with his own list of Jacobins, and we had to pay him to run promotions among is Jacobin list. Because what I did want — and we did have probably nearly 100 people in the audience who were very sympathetic to socialism. Either they were Jacobins or they were very sympathetic to socialism. Because those are the people I wanted to talk to. And so we had to pay and we had to work for that. And so I was very concerned about whether Bhaskar would even show up. I don't know if you remember, when he made his initial presentation, he said that he was reluctant to come. I was glad that Naomi chummed it up with him and was not at all imposing so that he felt comfortable.

And so I didn't have the time — I really would have coached him. I would have told him in advance: Bhaskar, this is going to be my argument. Because I didn't want to play a poker game with him. I wanted him to come in with his best stuff. And if he had, he might have given me all kinds of other kind of lame we responses to this idea that you can obviously own the means of production if you're a worker, and that if it's oppressive to work for capitalists, you don't have to. You can have worker-owned firms. And so I would have wanted him to come in with his best argument.

And by the way, Bhaskar Sunkara is a socialist entrepreneur. He's created *Jacobin* magazine. He's got 38,000 subscribers. He's bought a socialist newspaper in England, and that's where he got into trouble with the workers. He paid them 70% of back pay, and they claimed that he ratted on some other commitment he was supposed to make to them. And so if anybody can build a socialist revolution it's he. And the other reason why I wanted to debate him is that he does come out very strongly for freedom for dissenting opinion. So I thought, well, he's the primary guy who cares about freedom. Recognize that if all investment is going to be decided on by a state-run bank, then there's not going to be any freedom, because the state-run bank is going to turn down my Soho Forum, just for starters. Anyway, but I'm glad you appreciated it, Tom. What did you think — I got a note from my son and from others who said I got a little bit of hot under the collar for the last half of the debate, and you gave me a thumbs up. You said that wasn't so terrible.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't like when people say — because it's the same kind of mentality that says Brett Kavanaugh shouldn't have been upset that they are saying he was a rapist. Now, Gene, I think it made the debate all the more interesting, because as people will see when they watch — and notice, I didn't say "if" they watch. They'll notice *when* they watch — and by the way, this makes great weekend viewing, or you're at home and there's nothing to watch. Make some popcorn, plug the computer into your TV or whatever, and watch it. But there were times when in the exchange between the two of you, you were shouting at him. A couple of times, you actually shouted, "Learn some economics." And so what's so satisfying about that is that: haven't we all wanted to shout that? And to actually see someone do it, for me I thought it was a thrill.

EPSTEIN: Well, thanks, Tom. Nobody sells something better than you do, Tom, because I guess every product you choose, you actually believe in, so you come through very sincerely about what you endorse. And I thank you for that.

I wanted to mention one other thing, that I was trying to remember why, when I read about this idea in David Friedman's book *The Machinery of Freedom*, David has a chapter on how the

workers can just take over the economy if they want. They don't have to bring down capitalism. They can just use capitalist means to take over the means of production. But when I read that chapter – I know the book originally came out in '73, that's Friedman's book *The Machinery of Freedom* – I read it, must have read it a few years after the book was published, and the argument was not new to me when David Friedman trotted it out.

And I realized that it was actually – when I read my first libertarian book, which I think for most people is an odd one. That was *Man, Economy, and State* by Rothbard, and that's where Rothbard – and I looked it up, because I tried to remember where did I read it. It really is in *Man, Economy, and State*, where Rothbard specifically inveighs against consumer sovereignty. And he actually takes on the economist W.H. Hutt, who argued for consumer sovereignty. And he specifically – and I just re-read the part in the book *Man, Economy, and State* where he specifically argues that there is only individual sovereignty under capitalism, and that individuals, they have sovereignty over themselves and over their property. And by the way, that means that consumers have sovereignty over themselves and over their property in terms of what they want to spend. And that was a number of years before I read David Friedman.

And because I was actually involved a little bit of the tail end of a commune and very much involved with the New Left movement to build the alternative economy, the challenge leveled by left-leaning people like Paul Goodman, just live the revolution now. You don't have to use ugly politics to live it. Create a commune and create an alternative lifestyle, *The Whole Earth Catalog*, it was a very flawed, all that kind of like having to do with being self-sufficient, all of that stuff. So the specific idea of individual sovereignty under a free market was my core notion.

And you actually, Tom, have given me the opportunity to talk about that with respect to free trade. When Bob Murphy debate and Vox Day, I thought Bob did a good job, but Bob worked within the framework of a profit-and-loss capitalism. He never – you gave me the opportunity to say in public, and now, Vox Day wasn't there. Say: Vox Day, look, if you think that people should not buy foreign goods, foreign-made goods, then exercise your individual sovereignty and stop buying foreign-made goods. There's no argument there. The only argument is: do you have a right to tell me not to buy foreign-made goods? Of course, you do not. But you certainly have the right to tell others: join me in not buying foreign made goods. That's your choice. And so in a way, there should be no argument between the likes of us and Vox Day, so long as he recognizes that he has no right to pass a law forcing us not to buy foreign-made goods.

And so that approach, the understanding about individual sovereignty I think is that the core of any vision of the way you want to live. And I'm reflecting, as well, Tom, I heard your discussion, your recent podcast which talks about how the academy loses people, loses libertarians. And indeed, I made my choices in life not because I was maximizing my income. I knew early on I'd do much better if I became a lawyer and went into litigation, because I'm a good debater. I was a professor at a university and I dropped out, because I just couldn't stand victimizing young people. And I told you on a previous podcast that in my second year of teaching, I gave guaranteed passes, guaranteed Cs, because I don't want to victimize kids. I knew that I couldn't survive in the university, given that principle, so I left. So that was another reason for leaving.

But again, I think that if most people ask themselves how they live their lives, they'll certainly acknowledge that making a living and doing well financially is an issue, but it's often not the

primary issue. We're all exercising our individual sovereignty. And so really, I'm almost sorry I didn't have time to point that out to Bhaskar, point that out to the socialists in the audience. And if you want to bring about a socialist economy, of course, you've got to persuade others to join you. But if it's such a good idea, it shouldn't be difficult to sell others on the idea.

And actually by the way, David Gordon does go into this in his book about Marxism, you know, the latter day Marxists. He points out that you could have worker-owned companies competing with capitalist companies, and if it's such a good deal for the worker-owned companies, that it's such a good deal to work for a worker-owned company, then the capitalist companies will just have to do without, because that's the free market. But of course, many people really do not want to take on the headaches of being the capitalists. I mean, in a way, I think that's almost what Bhaskar was realizing, because Bhaskar does take on the headaches of being the capitalist. And for many people, by the way, work is just a way to get by. They'd just rather have hobbies. They'd rather live for their own religion. You know, they've let 100 flowers bloom. But if you want to build communes, you want to build a socialist economy, you can do so.

WOODS: I thought, of course, one of the most effective things you did was to just hound him mercilessly on one or two points. And in particular, your question about if somebody voluntarily said, "I'd like to go work for Gene Epstein, and he and I have worked out an arrangement whereby I'll do such and such for him, and in return, he'll pay me such and such per month." And you asked him: would you put this person in prison for engaging in an ordinary capitalist labor contract? And he didn't really want to answer that question. But I mean, there was a brief moment where he did, where he said, look, even now, there are restrictions on the kinds of agreements that employers and employees can enter into. So what he was saying was, under socialism, the kinds of things that would be punished would be different. But in principle, that's not radically a different arrangement, because even now, there are arrangements that would not be considered acceptable. But I think what you were trying to drive at was most people find this totally unobjectionable and normal and they could see themselves making such a proposal. Would they wind up in prison? And he could not give you an unambiguous no.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, he said that that probably would not be necessary at one point —

WOODS: Because they wouldn't want to, because under socialism, they would want to work for work-owned companies. But your point was: what if they didn't?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, exactly. I mean, as matter of fact, it's funny that every time — I did watch the debate, and of course much of the time, when you're watching yourself, you think, darn, I could have said something there. Then I honestly am sorry that when he said that probably wouldn't be necessary because, as you just said, he's implying working for a worker-owned firm is so much better. And I would say, go for it then. Knock yourself out. That of course was exactly, by the way, the point that David Gordon made, that most likely, if the worker-owned firms are competing with the capitalist-owned firms, most workers would prefer the capitalists. And I would have said: well, that's just the point. If that's the case, Bhaskar, then go for it. Then build the worker-owned companies right now. You can do it. And if it's such a better idea for everybody, then you guys will win, and everybody will flock to it. You'll have a demonstration project. Isn't this an exciting idea, Bhaskar, for you to make the socialist revolution right now?

But no, Bhaskar, you're much more comfortable writing your articles, getting your contract — I mean, Bhaskar's got a contract with Basic Books, by the way. You know, Thomas Sowell published *Knowledge and Decisions* with Basic Books. That's a premium label. This kid is going places as a writer and socialist entrepreneur within a capitalist economy. And of course, it's so much more fun to talk about politics and should we vote for the Democratic Socialist Party or whatever. But much more difficult, much more difficult to really face your own beliefs and start building socialism right now. So I was sorry I didn't take advantage of making that point.

But the other part of it, though, is I did say sincerely in my summation that I almost them happy that Bhaskar kept ducking that point, because I said: Bhaskar, you're too much of a lover of freedom to really face that, and that's why the socialist economy, real socialism wouldn't stay alive for more than a month if you were in charge, because you're naturally a lover of freedom.

I don't know if you know, the other part of it that I let go was when Bhaskar surprisingly talked about what a basketball enthusiast he is. And I mean, I was just amazed that somebody from the audience asked about the inflated salaries of basketball players and corporate CEOs, and Bhaskar said: well, the basketball players are probably not even being paid enough. And it turns out that he's an absolute passionate basketball fan. I just couldn't believe it. The kid is filled with contradictions. But anyway, it was quite an evening.

WOODS: Do you think he laid any real blows on you?

EPSTEIN: Well, you know, let's say — yeah, no — yes. I remember, I asked him a question, and I was surprised. I'd seen this tweet he'd written, and I thought that he had fired a couple of people. And now I'm not even knowing the source of the tweet. He said, "I've just fired a couple of people. That's the way capitalism works. Welcome to the real world." And I thought that he had — I had seen that tweet, and I don't even know the origins of it now. I thought that it actually was a tweet he'd sent out, which tried to show — I thought he was saying: I had to fire somebody, and that's only because I'm forced to play a capitalist game in this corrupt society, but welcome to the awful world of capitalism, and so on. I thought that was the point he made.

So if you recall, the first question I asked him was about that tweet, and then I was going to put him on the spot about firing people under socialism, but let's say it didn't land a blow, but he certainly stood his ground. It turned out that he would — you know, it's like in an academic department, if you need to get rid of somebody, you go through protocol and need to do downsizing. So I was surprised that — and I didn't have time to ask him what was the source of that tweet. I don't understand what you were talking about then. So he is acknowledging that under socialism, you can fire people. So that's where he did surprise me a little bit.

When he then went on to say that, well, but we're going to fire people under socialism, we're going to have a social safety net, and people aren't going to starve the way they do on capitalism — and you make the other point where I could have said that — no, I didn't want to go that route about the social safety net, because again, what you talk about, which is that in a debate — and it actually went on for 88 minutes. We exceed the number, because my man in the audience who was keeping time thought that we spent so much time arguing with each other and knew, of course, there'd be a lot of haranguers from the audience, so he allowed it to 88 minutes. But even so, in 88 minutes, you only have a certain amount of time to make a

few points and what you're saying to keep repeating those points, because if the other side won't answer them, then keep repeating them, because they will answer in different ways.

At another point, if you recall, Bhaskar even said: oh, well, yeah, we could have crowdfunding. And that's when I said, "Guys, let's have a round of applause. Bhaskar said we could have crowdfunding." But when you mentioned when Bhaskar said, well, we do have restrictions on wage contracts even now, and of course he was quite right about that, I could have said: indeed, we forbid people to work for less than the minimum wage. We have restrictions on interns. We have all kinds of bad stuff. But for me to go down that route I thought would have been fruitless. By and large, he was just talking about being able to work for a capitalist, and so I thought, well, let's stick to the main point about, by and large, we do have reasonable freedom with respect to labor contracts and far more freedom than Bhaskar would allow. So I thought, let me stick to that main point and not go down certain routes.

So of course, a few things you have to decide on is what challenges will you not pick up on and what challenges will you pick up on. In my case, it was easy enough to recognize that the challenges with respect to economics and prosperity, that wasn't the central debate. It was all about freedom. And so by and large, it was easy enough for me to see that where he kept ducking the basic points having to do with whether he would put people in jail, how far would he go in punishing people for working for capitalists, and then how would he try to cope with my point that you can have the socialist economy within the context of capitalism, there he might have come up with some cheap arguments about how all the capitalists are going to organize against us and all kinds of stuff about how there would have been fights within capitalism.

The truth of the matter is that — you know, I wrote an article about worker ownership for *National Review*. I was interested in the worker ownership move that was by and large playing by capitalist rules, and it was a favorable piece in William F. Buckley's magazine, *National Review*. *The Wall Street Journal* is editorializing about a couple of worker-owned firms, we wish them well. You know, the fact of the matter is that, if the socialist movement played the capitalist game, there would be plenty of sympathy and plenty of interest. I would have interest in the experiment. I'm sure you would. This is another way to live. If this is the way people want to live and they respect property right, fascinating. Go for it. Let's see how successful it can become. Why not?

But Bhaskar didn't even try making that counter argument. I mean, the only thing he said, rather ineptly, was, well, it's so difficult to cope and compete under capitalism because of crazy stuff. And that's when I responded by saying, "Bhaskar, focus on the consumer side of this." That was probably when I did say, "Learn some economics." I said to him the bottom half accounts for one third of all consumer spending. Probably, that number surprises you. The bottom four-fifths accounts for almost two-thirds. So consumers will just decide: we want to favor the socialist firms.

By the way, when I appeared on your show talking about consumer refusal to buy goods bought from abroad, a lot of people — my father for the first 20 years after World War II, he was not buying German cars. And then after that point, he was only buying American cars. I mean, there really are a lot of people who will not necessarily maximize their own welfare; they'll just decide they want to spend their consumer dollar on things that they believe in. And so consumers would buy from — "Look for the union label." That's another old one, by the way. Buy products that are made by unions. That's a perfect right that you have under

capitalism. And again, my point is that the idea of individual sovereignty is a very important card to play when we're talking to people who are against free trade. The point is that the only difference is: don't impose that on me. If I want to buy goods from abroad, that's my right. If you don't want to, that's your right. If you want to persuade others not to do so, that's also your right. And so go for it. That's what individual sovereignty is all about. And I had to remind myself I learned that in the very first book I read that introduced me to Austrian economics and libertarianism, Murray Rothbard's book *Man, Economy, and State*.

WOODS: Let's talk for a minute if you don't mind about Dave, Dave Smith and his routine.

EPSTEIN: Oh, yes, I loved him.

WOODS: Well, Dave had of course a challenging — well, a challenging challenge before him, because talk about a mixed crowd. You've got people who really have been kind of at each other's throats, and he's going to try to make everybody laugh with the same material. And the thing that I liked about what Dave did is that, frankly, in my experience, there is no chance a socialist comedian would have been as generous as Dave was. Yeah, he took some — had a little fun at the expense of socialists, but he made at least one self-deprecating joke about libertarians. He made a couple of attempts to point out areas where the two sides agree. And in particular, he made the point that everybody thinks we like George W. Bush and everybody thinks you guys like Hillary Clinton, when the fact is, we can't stand either one of them. You would have thought there'd be some kind of nodding of recognition in that crowd. *Yeah, gee, that is annoying, because I can't stand Hillary, and I'm on the left.* And it was like he was from Mars or something. I thought if socialists understood their own positions, these things would resonate with them. It was shocking to me how resolutely they refuse to go along. Because my point is that no socialist comedian is going to go out of his way to say, well, let's talk about some areas where we both really struggle with the American establishment, and man, we're always on the losing end, and it's always the neocons and the neoliberals who are winning. I just don't think a socialist comedian would have been that generous, you know? Prove me wrong.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, absolutely. Well, look, I love your show, Tom, and of course I'm always second guessing myself and second guessing others. I remember — this will sound irrelevant. It isn't really. I remember you have Lew Rockwell on. I love the guy. He's actually my rabbi. I love Lew Rockwell's lectures and talks. But then I forget, when the question came up: aside from the nonaggression principle, my right to move my fist opposite your chin, what's the next part of libertarianism? And I really wanted to shout at you and Lew, "Guys, the next part is tolerance." Because the point is that if you live in a libertarian world and you endorse freedom, then you've got to learn tolerance. Tolerance of atheists, agnostics, Muslims, people who do things that — they don't do it your way, you might not like the way they do it, you might not like their viewpoint, their opinions. And so obviously, that's part of the point, which is that you, I, and others who are libertarians, we just said — because we can object to lots of things we don't like that people do, but we can't pass a law against it the way the progressives can. And we might not like the scalpers, we might not like the blackmailers. That gets back to Walter Block's book *Defending the Undefendable*. We might think they're nasty people, but we've got to be tolerant. We've got to understand that we've got to tolerate nasty people in this world.

So I think that's the core reason why Dave was able to talk that way to socialists. I mean, I want to quote some of his lines. You can't ruin Dave's jokes. And when he first made the joke, he said, "But we can all agree that Donald Trump is doing a great job," that was one —

WOODS: That was so funny, yeah.

EPSTEIN: But then his conciliatory part of it was, you know, we both hate war, right? We both hate the warfare state, so why can't we just open up together? And then the other one is: hey, this is what we really have in common, why both sides can really get along, which is that whatever happens, our side always loses. That was his other sardonic point, and indeed he couldn't cozy up to those people.

But just to entice you a bit, the guy is a comic genius. I mean, Tom, you and I may be merely brilliant. I don't know if either of us are geniuses. Dave is brilliant as a commentator on his *Part of the Problem* show, but where he really does show a touch of genius is the way he's able to work an audience as a standup comedian. I couldn't believe his standup — he had brilliant standup at my gun control debate, but then this time too, he really had to work the audience in two different ways, because he got pretty severely heckled twice, one time rather seriously. And this part I won't spoil for you. But you know, knowing how to deal with a heckler and how to make it funny, how to maintain your dignity at the same time, this really requires a stroke of genius.

And so it was really — the best performance, the real genius performance was from Dave Smith. Bhaskar and I were sort of like anti-climactic, but I was very pleased that Dave was impressed with my performance as I was with his, and so that was also quite gratifying. But really, you know, hopefully, stick around for the first nine minutes of the video, because you've really got to appreciate Dave and his routines and what happened and the way he dealt with the audience. And then Bhaskar is up for the first 15 minutes, and then I get my 15 minutes, and then probably you'll want to see after my 15 minutes what happens next. So I do hope that everyone gives the video a try. I think you'll enjoy it and find it enlightening, as well.

WOODS: Well, absolutely agreed. And one final thought on Dave. Again, simply the fact that he was given such a challenging assignment, so difficult to make that work and to walk that line, and I think he did a terrific job. The thing is, it's also hard to assess this, because a lot of times if I speak at the Mises Institute, I have a microphone up at the front of the room, but there are no mics hanging over the audience. So you can hear the audience reaction, but it's very muted compared to what people who were at the event would have heard.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, no, no, that's right. No, as a matter of fact, I told — yeah, you're making an interesting point, which Dave told me. I told Dave that really, the nine minutes he does — y and maybe the word "genius" is one way of putting it. "Inspired" is another, because you don't — I mean, you are there, you're basically talking substantively, but you're there to be funny. You're there to make people laugh. You are there to make people see the hilarious, the humorous, the sardonic side of life, and you're in front of an audience.

And so I told him, my God, those nine minutes, we could collect them, and then Dave made the same — you know, you guys are a technical pros, and Dave made the same point. He said it's going to seem a little bit lame, because the audience reaction is going to be muted. And so if you just showed Dave's nine minutes, which he's done now for at least six or seven of my

maybe nine or ten of my debates, and so clearly, there's a lot of great content there, and it shows how Dave can actually tell jokes that are directly relevant to the topic, then I guess that would be a problem. And I almost wanted to tell Dave, you know, put it in a laugh track, but that I guess would offend Dave's principles and so I suppose you just have to listen to all the debates and stick around and watch Dave's comedy. But it's very effective, I found, even watching it where there's no mic from the audience. The guy clearly is inspired.

I'll tell you something funny. I always tell podcasters that if you want personal details about your own life, or if you want to tell jokes, all of that is great. But work it in with the content. The humor, the personal details, get to the content and then with the content, if there are jokes, if there are personal details, and all of that, that enhances it. But it's got to be part of the content.

Now, you and Bob have a wonderful, wonderful comedy routine going on *Contra Krugman*. You guys are hilarious. But of course, the real test is would you be able to be funny and hilarious without your content? And Bob said probably not. I said, that's why you guys are great, you're very funny, but you're not Dave Smith. It's a great component. The way you guys lob insults off each other is great, but it's always worked in with the content. Dave can be flying high on a stage just telling jokes, but content is part of it. That's what puts him in a class by himself.

WOODS: Absolutely agreed. Well, remember everybody, the website is TheSohoForum.org. You've got an event coming up. You have them pretty much every month now. So you've got an event coming up in November. Do you want to take 30 seconds to talk about that?

EPSTEIN: I'd love to, yeah. November 14th, John McWhorter, he's an African American writer, and I'm glad I lured him into a debate. He said this is the only resolution he would ever want to defend in an Oxford-style debate. Anti-racism, the message of anti-racism, anti-racism is as harmful to American life as the message of racism itself. The message of anti-racism is as harmful as the message of racism itself. And he's got a very worthy opponent in a professor from NYU named Nikhil Singh. And this rather hot-button issue I think is going to be discussed and argued in a very, very dignified manner, but it's clearly one that generates a lot of heat and passion. So I invite everybody to come on the evening of November 14th. If you can't make it to New York, it will be available on video and podcast.

WOODS: All right, so you can check out the video for the debate we've been talking about at TomWoods.com/1272. All right, thanks, Gene. I'm sure we'll talk again soon. And remember, we're not going to say the — actually, maybe I did kind of sort of spill the beans about this, but I think I have you coming on for a debate, if we can just settle on a resolution. I'll get back to you through email about that.

EPSTEIN: I'd be happy to do that one, Tom, sure.

WOODS: Okay, thank you, Gene. Thank you for your service, let me put it that way.

EPSTEIN: [laughing] Great, thanks, Tom.

