

REVEALED: The Sick TRICK to Make You Support Evil | Jay Shapiro

If you kill someone, they call you a murderer. If you kill a few people, they call you a mass-murderer. If you kill millions, they call you a great statesman. But how are we constantly tricked into supporting mass-murder AND applaud the sick monsters that lead us to do it? Well, turns out, there are some tricks. Jay Shapiro, filmmaker, writer, and host of The Dilemma Podcast, discusses his book *Insufficient Rewards* and its critique of consequentialist morality. The conversation explores cognitive dissonance, moral integrity, political systems, propaganda, objective reality, justice, peace, and how people rationalize participation in violence and injustice. Links: What Jay Thinks: <https://whatjaythinks.com> *Insufficient Rewards*: <https://www.simonandschuster.net/books/Insufficient-Rewards/Jay-Shapiro/9781803419985> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introducing Jay Shapiro and the book 00:01:02 Why Jay wrote *Insufficient Rewards* 00:04:32 History, morality, and consequentialism 00:08:06 The flexibility of consequentialist thinking 00:09:15 The actor's moral dilemma 00:12:06 Moral integrity and unjust systems 00:16:30 Ukraine, sanctions, and moral certainty 00:18:12 Cognitive dissonance and insufficient rewards 00:27:07 Moral integrity, self-deception, and complicity 00:32:11 First-order and second-order desires 00:43:06 Objective reality and moral truth 00:49:09 Justice, peace, and international violence 00:57:34 Where to find Jay's work

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today, for the first time, with a great colleague in Germany at the moment, Mr. Jay Shapiro, who wrote a very fascinating book recently, *Insufficient Rewards: How We Traded Integrity for Comfort and Outsourced Morality to History*. A beautifully long title, but you can see he's a philosopher. And Jay, by the way, also has a YouTube channel. That's the one over here, The Dilemma Podcast. But we want to mainly focus on the book today. Jay, welcome.

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah, thanks. It's a great pleasure being here. I'm a big fan of your show, so this is an honor being on it.

#Pascal

No, thank you very much for that. And thank you very much for your book, because you try to make sense of the international world and you put clearly a philosophical framework around it, as in

scholastic philosophy, not just what's good, what's bad, although that's what it boils down to. But can you maybe walk us a little bit through the arguments of your book?

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah, absolutely. I'll throw one corrective in there, because you called me a philosopher there. I'm uncomfortable with the title. I think of myself as a filmmaker, really. But actually, on this topic, my sort of crash-course background is I was pursuing a degree in screen studies and film, which is what I ended up getting, when 9/11 hit when I was a sophomore. And that was actually the event that started me thinking a lot about questions of morality and political philosophy and moral philosophy. And I started taking more classes in it.

I ended up getting the degree in film and ended up making films, and some films that intersected with moral philosophy. But just sort of like, I'm itchy with the title of philosopher because it's such, like, a weird gatekept thing. And in some ways, that's a lot of the reason I wanted to write the book, because I think moral philosophy, as far as my couple decades now of studying it and understanding it and working with well-known intellectuals who I have major disagreements with now, I think it's in a major rut.

It's in just like an absolute awful, boring moral stalemate place, where every political conversation, every moral conversation we get into ends up just seeming to get into this gridlock where everyone ends up just calling the other person a hypocrite. It goes nowhere, and I really wanted to get under that and get behind that. And so the book was me, you know, thinking out loud on the page about a lot of the things that I found along the way to think differently about moral philosophy. And especially the question that sort of launched it for me was what we really mean when we use this phrase that history will be the judge, or history will judge our enemies. You know, these classic questions of: can I morally judge a slave trader? Or someone in the future, can they morally judge the way that I'm living now? And what does that really mean, to speak about morality in this sort of context? And so those were the questions that launched my initial sort of path down these questions.

And what I came out with was, I hope, a pretty big dose of skepticism on concepts of utilitarianism, sort of consequentialism, effective altruism, which are really—and I could explain those things, we could talk about them more—have become sort of the default way that I think most people digest or think about morality and moral philosophy, even if they've never thought of themselves as even thinking of these things. In a very neoliberal kind of mathematical, quantifiable world, this desire to want to measure morality and measure outcomes is a very utilitarian, consequentialist way of thinking of it.

And then the counter to that, the opposite of that, is—this is a little bit of sort of straw man in philosophy—but deontology, which is like a rules-based order, maybe divine command theory, like God tells you what's good and bad and you have to follow those rules. And we have this, like, seesaw of two conversations where you have people just pushing principles all day. Like, I have a

principle of, let's say, sovereignty, and it's my most classic principle or whatever, but I make some exceptions when it's, I don't know, Russia, Ukraine, Israel, Palestine, whatever it is. And then suddenly, oh, you're not actually into the principle anymore, you're doing consequentialism, right? It's the consequences, it depends, you know, the outcomes of the thing that actually determines the morality. And we're just always on this stupid seesaw, and we all flip back and forth whenever it's convenient for us. And I want us to sort of just burn down the seesaw and think about morality in a really different way. And so that's why I wrote the book. Not quite the thesis, but those were my frustrations and why I pursued it.

#Pascal

And, you know, this morality question is very important, especially to kind of a liberal conception of international politics, right? Because we see that the whole time. They're forcing it down our throats on TV and in the newspaper all the time, to be on the right side of history and do the right thing, do the good thing. I mean, you're living in Germany now, and, like, Germany itself, it basically predicates its entire support for Israel's Zionist project on this, you know, the immorality that happened before, the horrible crimes that were happening. And I shouldn't do air quotations. I don't mean that those were horrible—like, what Hitler, Nazi Germany did, what Germany did back then was a horrible crime, because it killed so many people, not just the Jews, first and foremost, also tens of millions of Soviet citizens. But the question over whether it is useful to use that kind of moral framework.

#Jay Shapiro

What did you come up with in your book then?

#Pascal

Which kinds of groups of people are using moral frameworks, and which ones are rather going a pragmatist route of trying to analyze what is and then how to improve from where we are, instead of, like, how it should be?

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah, yeah. No, that's a great question. And I have a chapter in there where I sort of list all—I mean, it wasn't exhaustive—all of the people I could find in history that use the phrase, you know, invoke history to sort of justify what they're doing currently. And Hitler was one of them who said, you know, history—I think he said something like, "History will judge what happens here today," or "will vindicate." You know, everyone has said this, everyone. And so, you know, you ask it there, like, sort of who's using a moral framework versus who's doing sort of pragmatic stuff. I think everyone is using the moral framework, particularly of consequentialism. I could just lay it out here, and it gets critiqued of being infinitely flexible, which I think it is.

And so the sort of, like, basics, since we're talking World War II here, the one that is usually used in, like, Philosophy 101 classes is, like, everyone knows it's wrong to lie. It's like a moral framework thing. You shouldn't lie, right? But if you're hiding Jews under the floorboards and the Nazis knock on your door and say, "Hey, are you hiding any Jews?" should you lie to them? And then suddenly you're like, "Oh, okay, wait. Lying is wrong, but in this case, I think it's actually good." And so if you slow your brain down there and figure out what's happening there, you're invoking what's called consequentialism. So the act itself is not inherently moral or good or bad or whatever. It's sort of, you project a split in the universe if you make this action.

And then you have universe A and universe B. So it's universe A where you lied and presumably the guy at the door believed you, and then this is the universe that pops out of that. Or you have universe B where you told the truth and presumably he believed you. And you're then somehow sort of like putting these two universes on some sort of scale of goodness and badness and figuring out which one is better. In this case, presumably, if they believed you and you saved those people hiding under the floorboards, it's better. And that measurement of these, you know, counterfactual future universes that sounds very, like, technical is really what you're doing there. And the determination of that is actually what determines whether the action was moral or immoral. So that's consequentialism.

#Jay Shapiro

And yeah, the critique of it is that it's really... It sounds very rational. It sounds very logical. There's like a whole world of sort of, you know, debate bros who love this kind of thinking that's very, like, mathematical and strict, and there's this desire to want to measure these outcomes. But it is infinitely flexible because you can justify anything, given sort of, just let the universe play out long enough, and how you're going to measure these things, and how much is sort of integrity worth? What really is flourishing? So, for example, I'll give, like, a much more mundane example that we all live through, rather than probably, hopefully, none of us are faced with that particular one of hiding people under floorboards.

But so I used to judge this competition called the Ethics Bowl, which is a philosophy competition in America for high school students, which is really fantastic. If anybody's looking for a fun night, go to their website and pull up some of these cases they do and just argue with your friends over it because they give you sort of these, like, little, you know, one-page scenarios. And then you have to sort of discuss the moral philosophy of them. So one of them that I use in the book, that I end up using all the time, I just love the way people respond to it, is this one. I'll give it to the audience. There's a young man who wants to be an actor.

Let's just name him Marcus. And he's in Los Angeles, and he's always wanted to be an actor, and he's struggling. He's, like, running low on cash. He's been at this for a few years. He's, like, waiting tables. He's just trying to get by. He's going to auditions and auditions and auditions, and he just

can't find a break. And, you know, he's really, he's really on thin ice. And then he, you know, goes to another audition and finally gets the call from his agent being like, "Oh, wow, you know, they love you, and they want to offer you the role." And it's a huge TV show. It's going to be a huge thing.

They have a ton of money behind it. You're going to be, like, one of the main stars. Like, this is your big break. Of course, Marcus is really excited. Then he gets the script for the show, and he reads it, and Marcus is Black, so he's African American, and he reads the script and his heart sinks because he realizes the role that they want him to play. He is reading on the page, and it's like, in his mind, it's a super harmful portrayal of Black people. It's like minstrel show kind of stuff, and, like, really trashy. And he has these, like, really ugly feelings about it. And so, what should Marcus do? Right. That's sort of the whole scenario, right?

And so, if you're a consequentialist, you start doing the math, and it's basically just making a list of pros and cons, being like, well, you're going to go hungry if you don't take this job. You need the money. Or take the job and become a big star. And then when you have a big platform and more power, you could use that to promote the causes you want or talk about whatever you want. You could give money away to charity. Your brain is going on and on and on of all the reasons why you should take this thing. Or if you're a deontological or more just sort of principled person, you're like, no, racism is always wrong. No matter what, you have to reject it. And racism is just wrong. There's no argument to be made to take the job.

And, like, you could flip the other way. If you're sort of like a principled, I don't know, free market person being like, "Oh, just, you know, take the job and, you know, be neoliberal in Ayn Rand's kind of style." You could flip that argument anyway. You're never going to come to some clear, magical solution in the sky that tells you what Marcus really ought to do. Whatever he decides to do there, he can make a moral defense for it. And really, like, that dilemma, I think, is just, you know, I call it, like, the mundane dilemma. Everybody listening to that should be insanely familiar with that. We do that all the time, right? And especially the neoliberal capitalist society we live in.

And the important takeaway that I want to get across, certainly in the book, is that if you decide, like, my big come-to to get out of this mess, I put a big emphasis on moral integrity. And I could talk about how I define that and what I think that means. But if you can say with your moral integrity intact that you had no choice but to do X—so if Marcus tells me, like, listen, it's a wound to my moral integrity. I know it's hurting my moral integrity to take this, but I have no choice. I have no other options, and I have no choice. And he can say that with his moral integrity intact, which only he can really decide for himself, I think we should accept that analysis if he's being honest with it. But what he has discovered there is not moral clarity or the right answer. What he's discovered is a political problem that needs to be solved.

And what I would love us to do, if the book has any sort of influence on the way we think about systems, is to evaluate and judge systems morally, not based on these, like, Steven Pinker flourishing outcomes and charts going in certain directions or whatever. It's much more about this

question of how often is it requiring, demanding people in the systems who are being honest with themselves and really taking the time to examine it, being forced to or asked to or put into a position to damage or wound or do moral harm to their moral integrity. And I think, obviously, I think most people would agree we're living in systems that are requiring that to an extreme degree right now, especially in the neoliberal West. And I think it's why we're seeing much more revolt and resistance to all the systems that are putting us in those positions.

#Pascal

Yeah, the thing with the system question, though, is whether the people who engage in certain decisions, whether they are aware of what the decision does. I mean, I have this beautiful example now in front of me, being, you know, back home in Switzerland, where on the 27th of September, we're going to vote on a neutrality initiative, which I am highly in favor of. It's going to be a referendum. The no side, the yes side, we keep saying that, look, part and parcel of the problem that we have right now in not just the Ukraine war, but in a lot of the other wars, is also that the West constantly puts these sanctions, unilateral coercive measures. Those coercive measures kill every year half a million people, according to a Lancet study, according to well-researched and understood mechanisms of how this stuff works.

This is not a tool of international law. The United Nations says, "Don't do this." Two-thirds of the countries of the world in the General Assembly say, "Don't do it. We hate this stuff." It is really only North America and Europe that says, like, "No, no, no, sanctions are a very important tool of international law to protect international law." But again, the institution itself that is supposed to be in charge of international law, they're like, "Don't do it." But all of that, all of that is on the no side. The people who argue against it are completely being just shut out, as in that's not even being touched upon. It is assumed to be self-evident that sanctions put on an evil dictator will lead and will help to uphold international law.

So you can see how these groups are actually—both sides believe very strongly in the justice and in how good their actions are. That's just a reflection, especially with the Ukraine war. What I would call the pro-war side argues constantly, we need to shovel more weapons into Ukraine in order for them to defend themselves against the evil aggressor. Whereas on the other side, we argue like, no, you should stop with that in order to make sure that as few people as necessary still die before this thing comes to an end. And that's what it boils down to. So both sides argue from a position of control, believing that the good outcome will result from theirs. And then they ascribe the evil outcome to the other side, and hence evil intentions. How do we square with—how do we spread that kind of problem in international relations?

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah, it's a big question in international relations. But yeah, I, you know, I think if I could put another sort of key on the table, in the way I think about these things, is—so, because in my last

answer, I gave you sort of a run at what I think is wrong and a dead end in moral philosophy. Because you just—anywhere, anyone who goes to the Ethics Bowl and reads any of those cases, you'll find yourself always in the same argument. But I just gave you a principle versus consequence, as I use to sort of, like, outline what's happening everywhere politically when it comes to Ukraine or anything else. But another key that I bring in the book, and actually where the name of the book comes from, *Insufficient Rewards*, is from psychology. So, as just another quick background, if people look up a little bit of my bio, I worked really closely with people like Sam Harris.

I made a film with him and Majid Nawaz, and this very, again, utilitarian, atheistic, very, like, Steven Pinker-ish type world. And I know how those people think. Again, huge, huge differences with them. It split, you know, just dramatically after October 7th, obviously. But I often found myself in those worlds really frustrated that they were completely blind to psychology and, you know, they want to live in a world where the nodes in any system are really rational actors, right? Like, humans are rational creatures, and they do things that are self-interested or, you know, they wouldn't do things that harm themselves. And you want to evaluate people, and I get the attraction to do that, but I think, you know, it was, I think, Plato who said man is the rational animal, and I think it's not quite true. Man is the rationalizing animal, which is psychology.

And I think the field of psychology, in so many ways, you can boil down to a study of all the ways we can successfully lie to ourselves. And so I just want to get this other—and it'll answer your question in a roundabout way—but this other key in my thinking of the book and why nobody thinks they're evil. Of course, anybody arguing, you could send a million Ukrainians off to their slaughter tomorrow and think you're not evil using the arguments of consequentialism, being like, a better world will come from it, right? So, *Insufficient Rewards*, this title, comes from Leon Festinger's famous study in 1959 of cognitive dissonance. So, this was a huge key for me to unlock a lot of my thinking and think through these things.

So, I'll give it to the audience, see if they respond the same way. So, Leon Festinger in 1959 did this experiment on a college campus in New York that I think was brilliant. And so he had a control group and two experimental groups. So, your control group, and then experimental group A and experimental group B. And I'll walk people through it, and I think they'll see—hopefully they see what I see in it. So, control group A is like, it's a bunch of college students who sign up for psychological testing, which happens a lot on college campuses, without knowing exactly what it is. You just sign up, right? So they come in one by one.

And so someone comes into the room. One student sits down across from a researcher. And in front of them is like a pegboard. So it's like the size of a chessboard, basically, and has all these wooden kind of spindles on it just pointed up. And he says, "Okay, thanks for participating in the study. So in front of you is this pegboard. You see the top left cylinder. I want you to turn it counterclockwise, and then do the next one, the next one, and the next one. Do the entire row, do the entire board. And when you're done, do it again and do it for an entire hour. That's it. Go ahead."

So it's like, the face you made is perfect because you're like, "This is like the most boring, stupid thing I've ever heard of." Right? Is this the experiment? Right? And you sit there and you do the entire thing for an hour. And after the hour, the little alarm goes off, and he says, "Cool, thanks for participating. So we have a couple of questions." The really basic, like, how much do you enjoy it? How much scientific value did it have? You know, would you recommend it? And of course the control group is like, "Fuck no, it was really boring. You know, zero out of five stars, thumbs down, get me the hell out of here."

This was a waste of my time, right? But you would expect, okay, so that's the control group. So control group A—now we're going to, or the experimental group A—there's a little wrinkle. So it starts the same way. They come in, pegboard, can you turn them? Do it for an hour. They're like, "What the hell? This is really boring." The alarm goes off, and then I say—this is where the first wrinkle is—you don't get any questions yet. I say, "Okay, so I have a student waiting in the waiting room who's about to come in and do what you just did. And normally we have someone from the lab who sits with them and gets them excited for it, tells them how fun it's going to be, hypes them up."

It's a really interesting experiment, but they're running late today. Do you mind going out and sitting in and helping doing that for the next couple of students while we wait for our guy to come in? I'll give you 20 bucks—and with inflation, raise it to like 500 bucks. It was a significant amount of money for a college student at the time. Some of them say, "No, no thanks. Like, I just want to get out of here," maybe because that's a lie. But some of them take it and say, "Sure, I'll take the money and I'll go do that for you." And they go out and they tell the next student, "Hey, it's going to be really fun. It's going to be really interesting. You're going to really enjoy it." And they do that for a few students.

And then I go out into the classroom—waiting room—and I'm like, "Oh, cool, thanks for doing that. Our guy showed up, so you can go home. You're done. But before you go, do you mind answering a few questions for us?" And it's the same questions: How much did you enjoy the pegboard? Would you recommend it? Scientific value, right? With that group, you get a little bump up, but mostly they're like, "Yeah, I thought it was really boring. This is pretty stupid, but, you know, gave me a bunch of money, so I did what I did." And now, so those first two, no surprises there. But the last one is where he really made the discovery. It starts the same way. Student comes in, pegboard, do it for an hour. You're really bored.

Hey, my guy didn't show up. Do you mind going out and hyping these students up for a bit? I'll give you \$1. And so with inflation, whatever, five, ten bucks, a small amount. More of these students say, "Hey, no thanks. I just want to leave." But a lot of them still do it. And they're like, "Okay, all right." They go out and they tell the students, "It's going to be really fun. It's going to be really interesting. You're going to really enjoy it," blah, blah, blah. Do that for a few students. I go out, same thing. I tell you, "Hey, my guy showed up. You can go home. But before you do, a few questions." And here's where his discovery happened. Suddenly, this group, the \$1 group, was like, "You know

what? I really liked turning the pegs. It was really enjoyable. It was really fun. Like, it was actually great."

At first, maybe I thought it was a little boring, but then I got, like, into it, and it was, like, zen and really meditative. And it's really, really, really nice. So thanks. I'll take my dollar and leave. So what's happening here with this group? This was, you know, did I suddenly randomly get a bunch of pegboard lovers who just all took a dollar? So Festinger's theory, then, was the theory of cognitive dissonance, which is a word that gets tossed around like crazy in online discourse and arguments right now. But this is really what it comes from and what it means. His theory is that, you know, with the \$20 group, let's say the high-reward group, in their minds, you know, lying is wrong. It's a pretty minor infraction. You're lying to another student about, you know, it's not much, but you know it's wrong.

I did it for the money. Yeah, you know, I did it for the money. Or even better, you could say, like, you could say, you know, I'll give some to charity, like I have some left over, or like, you know, you know, or you could say, like, the system's screwed up here. My college tuition's too high, so I'm kind of, like, getting the man. There's a lot of ways to say, I did it, right? This is why I did the thing. But all of those excuses—not excuses, rationalizations—of why you lied to the student start to fail with the one-dollar group because they're like, that's not really a lot of money. I can't really say, like, I needed it, or it's going to be life-changing, or I'm going to give any to charity. Like, they all start to sort of fail. And this is cognitive dissonance. So it's like, it's often pictured like having gears in your head that are clashing, right? Like, I'm a good person. I'm lying. Good people don't lie.

And we actually can't—this is the important thing about cognitive dissonance—you can't persist. It has to resolve itself. It's actually like a position, a situation where we can't live within cognitive dissonance. Actually, we have to resolve it. So our brains and our minds—and this is this brilliant sort of breakthrough—are incredibly good at brainwashing ourselves. Because you can imagine, like, a little repairman—I do this in the book—coming into your brain being like, "I got to fix this clash of the gears." And he's like, "I got it. All these other rationalizations aren't working. You know what?"

You didn't lie. You actually really like turning wood pegs, so you weren't lying to those students. Everything was fine. And suddenly the gears all start to turn again. And that's it. That was his theory of what's happening there. And the insufficient reward actually is the best way for us to successfully lie to ourselves. But even the language gets weird there because you're not. You really, really believe it. Those students really believe that they enjoy playing with the pegboard. And it's not even to say believe. What's the difference between saying you really believe something versus you really do love playing with the pegboard?

And this state, again, so you're not living with cognitive dissonance now, the repair job has happened, I think, is surprisingly sturdy in our world, but also brittle and fragile and can be cracked and pierced in certain ways when you're reminded of certain things or you're shown certain images. And we're increasingly living in that world where, you know, my thesis is, and I hope to do it by

naming "Insufficient Rewards," is convincing more and more people that we're all in that one-dollar group, or nearly all of us are, especially with large moral infractions. Right? Very few people—the \$20 group is pretty rare. They're actually like psychopaths.

Because most people are like, I'll tell you, what you were just saying about sending Ukrainians off to their death in huge numbers. And they're like, well, I did it for the money, or I did it for capitalism. You're rarely going to get someone who just says that. They're in the \$1 group, meaning they're like, no, it's actually a good thing. It's actually not evil. It's not what it looks like. And they really do believe that. So anyway, that was a key for me in the book and certainly why I gave it the title. But I'm hoping more and more people feel themselves in the \$1 group, and you don't like it. When you alert yourself to it and you wake up to it, you want to leave the experiment, right? You want to break out of that and find authenticity.

#Pascal

So the whole title of the book, "Insufficient Rewards," they—to you—explain, like, a psychological phenomenon that people in these circumstances will trick themselves into believing: "No, I always thought so. Yeah, I always thought this was the right thing to do." Although, if you could wind back a little bit and show them the whole thing again, you would say, like, if you were honest to yourself, you would actually—you would just stand up and walk away and say, like, "No, this experiment sucks. I'm sorry, I'm not going to help you anymore." But with the experiment thing, it's like this thing of being asked to do something, right? And most of us are nice people who want to do something. It's like, fine, you know, it's not a big thing. I want to help you out. I know it's an experiment. And then you go. But that means you then have to start modifying and rewiring yourself in order to bring yourself into line again with what is then happening, also due to what you're doing.

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think it sets—I mean, the experiment for me was such a key because, yeah, it sets up a situation where, if you realize all the ways that you can successfully lie to yourself, you do start to be more skeptical of your own beliefs and your own weaknesses and your own ability to be bribed, as it were, into brainwashing yourself. And ironically, like, to broaden the scope away from just sort of like, you know, a student in the lab, I'm obviously trying to take Festinger's cognitive dissonance discovery and apply it on big scales of systems we live in, right? Like a genocide in Gaza as being something that happens. I mean, this is really my thesis. It's hard to get the language out, but that you know is wrong.

Even the people like Dana Bash or someone on CNN or something, who I think, she really believes what she says when she's interviewing these people as a Zionist, right? But she's in that one group. And the ironic part about that is, I'm saying to be in that one group, meaning, from some sort of view from nowhere, I would doubt that she really thinks this is the right—is not an immoral thing to do. You have to put on the table that she is being rewarded insufficiently for doing it, rather than

sufficiently. Like, she wouldn't tell you, or lots of— I could get off Dana Bash— people wouldn't tell you, like, you know, I actually think it's a genocide and it's totally immoral, but, you know, Israel gives me a lot of money, right?

Like, no one says that, even if we, like, from the outside, we're like, oh, you know, you're getting paid to say this. It actually works in a much more subtle way in psychology, where you're getting paid, but because, in my view, the infraction, the moral damage, is actually almost infinite to your moral integrity to support something especially like that, it will always be an insufficient reward. And so no matter what you're getting, you really do believe it, right? You're not going to—you're not going to tell me that you know what Israel is doing is wrong or you think it's immoral and you're just taking the money. No, you're actually being rewarded with something that is ultimately always going to be insufficient because I think moral integrity, which I could also get on the table, has a kind of infinite value to us.

And that's what I hope to sort of alert in people, that that is rather than sort of doing this plus-minus consequences, utilitarian kind of math. No, we have this maybe mysterious—and I approach the grounding problem in the book—sort of moral integrity conversation with ourselves that has almost infinite value. And no matter how many—you know, I live in a nice place—and if this is all sort of a reward, a sort of consequential, transactional reward from something like a neoliberal society that requires genocide to happen on the periphery, well, then this is insufficient too. And I'm not going to sit here and be bribed by the rewards that keep me trapped in pretending that, you know, something is moral when it's not, or that my moral integrity is not damaged even by participating in it. So...

#Pascal

It's a really, really interesting way of thinking of what it is that then flips the switch. So if I use that on a different example, it's like the people who ask me, "How much does Putin pay you to say that?" I should tell them, "That's the wrong question. You should ask them how little he pays me for me to then fool myself into believing that I'm saying the right thing." According to your book, that's the question to ask, right? Or the same with the Zionists. We have this gut feeling that we need to look for the money that the Zionists spend everywhere. But if what you're saying is actually what's happening psychologically, then we just need to look at how little people get out of being on the pro-genocide side in order to try to start making sense of it. Is that where you would be looking for?

#Jay Shapiro

I mean, they have to give you something. There has to be some reward. But they can give you—Pascal, you could be getting \$20 million from Putin right now—and I would have sort of the same thesis. I actually think these are all the wrong questions. You're right. It's not about who's getting paid or whatever.

#Pascal

It's about... what's the reason for believing what we believe? Or what you're saying is, you have reasons why people form beliefs that are induced beliefs that move them from their actual moral compass, right? And if that is right, then, well, you're just making everything even more difficult than it already was.

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah, absolutely. I'll put it this way. I think we live in a time that really dissuades people from doing moral examination and actually thinking of these things. I don't know what kind of education you got in school or whatever. It's almost totally absent, especially in American education. Maybe you got some in your religious school or whatever, which I'm not a big fan of. But let me run at it this way, because I consider myself a pretty strong humanist in this regard. So I'll put on the table what I mean by moral integrity as trying to alert this within people. I'm blanking on the psychologist, to give him credit here, who came up with the first instance of it, but so there's first-order desires and second-order desires, right?

The first-order desire is like, I'm just hungry for something. I just want something, and I go after it. So, like, a wolf has a first-order desire because it's hungry and wants to eat that rabbit, and it has an urge, and it chases the rabbit and eats it or doesn't eat it. And that's kind of the end of the story of the wolf. But a human, or man, has this second-order conversation and desire, which are desires about desires. So you can ask yourself, do I want to be the kind of person who wants to eat a rabbit? Do I want to be the kind of person—what do I want to want? I have these urges, but do I want to want to have those? What kind of man do I want to be? Like, I don't think a wolf is running around saying, what kind of wolf do I want to be? Right? Do I want to want to eat that rabbit? No, it has a first-order desire.

It chases it. It goes for it. It's not wondering whether it should be the kind of wolf that, you know, goes vegetarian or something like that. And in that tension, in the tension that man has between this ability to have second-order desires and our behavior is, I think, where all art, philosophy, even religion springs from, which is why I don't think wolves have religion or are going around making art. And, you know, there's some philosophers who de-emphasize the uniqueness or specialness of humans. And I'm definitely not on their side.

I think it's important to lean into that particular aspect, wrinkle that we have, which is kind of torturous, right? This is where you get questions of free will, right? A lot of people are like, man, I wish I could get rid of that. If you ever have friends who are like, I really just—or you yourself, or anyone listening—like, I wish I could be a bird. It looks so nice. It looks so free. But I think we're really—obviously the flying looks pretty fun—but I think what we're really expressing in that is this

desire to get rid of this fucking annoying conversation in our head about what kind of man do I want to be, right? It's just like, you have a desire, you go do a desire, sort of desires. But so in this, in this, what I would say is moral integrity, because I'm talking there is the moral animal.

Right. I don't think a wolf has moral regret. It can't, like, chase and kill a rabbit and then wonder if it did a bad thing and if it did an immoral thing. But a human can. Man can. I think moral integrity is a constant conversation of trying to align one's behaviors and one's thoughts and one's actions with their second-order desires rather than just chasing these first-order desires. Obviously, people probably could hear, we live in a world, a neoliberal capitalist world in the West, that is just feeding you first-order desires nonstop. It's just like a crazy lure to get you in that trap, and I think it's driving people crazy.

And so in that conversation of, if I—if—and people can only do this really with questions they ask on their own, in my view. There's no, like, objective way to do this, but really try to understand a conversation with yourself and the second-order desires and what moral integrity is. I think, at least for me, trying to do that has an almost, like I said, infinite, sacred-in-a-secular-sense quality of moral integrity. Yeah. And when you're—and so with your question of, like, how much is Putin paying? It's funny that we're talking about that. If that conversation about moral integrity is nearly an infinite, sacred kind of value, then, like I said, almost any reward that you get will be technically insufficient, right? Like, you can't bribe me away from my moral integrity if it's that sacred. But I'm also not going to put out an argument for moral purity. But yeah, yeah, go on.

#Pascal

Yeah, but, you know, the \$20 group, I mean, that you brought up is kind of this thing that says, like, no, if you pay enough, then they say, you know, they don't need to resort to self-manipulation in order to readjust their self with what they're doing, right? Then they can just blame it on the money. That's the \$20 group point, right? The \$1 group is the one that... So it needs to be a small reward, as your book says, right? If the reward is large, then people can just say, like, yeah, I know it was wrong, but I'll do it for the money. A couple of million dollars is fine. I'll participate in genocide.

I know it's not nice, but they're dying, not me. It's okay. I have a swimming pool. I have a Ferrari. It's fine. But a large part of the people who are part and parcel of the genocide industrial complex and so on, as Francesca Albanese keeps pointing out, right, for them, it's rather the small rewards and the kind of, like, rewiring themselves into saying, like, no, overall, I'm defending humanity and, you know, the Jewish homeland and whatnot. It is, I do think, quite important, actually, the difference between these rewards, if that experiment actually holds up on a large scale.

#Jay Shapiro

I mean, I would maybe contend that the \$20 group as well is... Well, so the important thing that you said there is, like, manipulating oneself successfully or not. And I think the \$20 group in this example

that we're using, what's important to me is as long as they are not manipulating themselves into saying that it's not immoral, right? Which... I still contend the important part to me is that they know what's wrong. The interesting thing in my book, or in this thesis that I'm going for, and I just have to sort of bite the philosophical bullet, is I'm like, if we take this to history, if I'm like, did people in the... Edward Colston is someone I write about. He's a slave trader whose statue was torn down during COVID in Bristol. Did he know or think that slavery was immoral deep, deep, deep down? And my argument is actually yes.

My argument is actually like, yeah, he did. And when we do things like, "History will judge us," like history will somehow reveal this to us somewhere in the future, that we always knew it was wrong at some point. That sounds like a kind of crazy thing for me to say, right? Because he was a slave trader. Like, how could he know what's wrong and do it? So again, he's not consciously knowing that it's wrong, but even he—and he was an insanely wealthy man, so this is kind of your point, right? Like, in today's equivalent, I did some math, and he would be like the CEO of Coca-Cola. So, I mean, massive thing, and he's a slave trader. In Bristol, you know, I think reading his biography as much as we can and understanding his life, he's still in that one-dollar group with such a massive reward.

I really think the \$20 group technically is much on a moral infraction such as slavery or genocide like this, like maybe the \$20 group when you're lying to another student in a room or whatever. But even that, I think we genuinely want to be good. I think humans want to be good. That thing that I did with the wolf and the human, I think we know that. I think it drives us crazy. I'm very influenced by someone like Erich Fromm, who wrote the insanely important book *Escape from Freedom*. It was called *Fear of Freedom in Europe*, all about the ways that we try desperately to hand that back over to God or to something else. We want to get rid of this torturous idea of having free will or being a moral creature. We want to give that back, but we can't. We deep, deep down want to be good.

We want to know what's good, and we want to do what's good. Even Edward Colston, a slave trader. So I don't know. I'm going to stick to my guns. That's a \$20 group, especially when it's a moral infraction like that. Or even a small one is an exceedingly rare psychology to be in, to be like, "I did something wrong, but I did it for the money." Obviously you hear people say this, but I think it's a bit of bravado, and it's like, it doesn't really get to the bottom of it. And I think it's fragile. Like, this is the thing. So, for example, somebody reacting really strongly to an image from, like, Hind Rajab is a way to pierce their sort of—even if there's somebody who tells you they're a Zionist and they think in certain ways—this bothers them, and it's good that it bothers them.

They get defensive. They want to tell you all these other reasons why it happened. Maybe it's cherry-picking. I mean, they have all the ready reasons for it. But it's because it immediately alerts this cognitive dissonance that they're like, "I know that's wrong. Deep down, I know somehow that that's wrong. But I have all these ready-made excuses for it." And the fragility that our repairman in our mind is constantly repairing these things for us. And we have to live like this. I'm not setting up some moral purity. We have to live like this, with some repair jobs in our heads just to survive.

And that might be a fundamental feature of humanity, although we live, like I said, in a system that's requiring way too much of it, and our brains are just clashing gears all the time. And I even wrote a chapter on veganism, which works the same way. Like, I don't know the percentage of your listeners who are vegan or not, and I'm definitely not on my high horse about it, because I went vegan because I fell in love with a vegan. And so it's an interesting case of: I became vegan. From a utilitarian perspective, I made some move in the right direction, if you think that's the right moral direction. But I actually didn't engage with the kind of discussion with moral integrity. I always agreed with the arguments. I just never aligned my behavior with it.

Right. It was the beauty of the vegan that you fell in love with that sold the concept to you, so fair enough. Probably, yeah, probably. But if you had showed me—and if any of your listeners—and this veganism and food happens to be an insanely morally sensitive topic for a lot of interesting reasons, but, um, you know, if somebody's eating, enjoying a pork dinner tonight, and I walk over and I'm like, "Oh, can I show you a picture of the pig that you're eating, playing and, you know, having a good time playing with a ball?" Like, they would be pissed, right? They'd be angry. And in that anger is revealed, like, anger. What I've done is just like, if you imagine the repairman in their class—in their gears—I just, like, pulled the duct tape off a little bit. Didn't take much. Just showing them a picture. And they know that it's like, "Fuck, that feels wrong to me."

Like, I killed that thing for the enjoyment of eating this pork. Like, that feels like an insufficient reward. You're getting a reward. I mean, I love the taste of pork. I used to eat pig and bacon all the time. Like, there's a reward, but it's insufficient when faced with the death and the killing of this pig. Everyone can have all the ready-made arguments of like, "Oh, I have to eat meat. It's healthier," or I've heard all the arguments, and I used to make them too, I'm sure, in my own mind, because you have to live with it. But it shows how fragile it is, and it shows how easy it is to interrupt and tear down a little bit that cognitive dissonance repairman in our mind. And it's annoying when you get it. It's angering. But in that anger, there's some hope. Like I said, it's actually like this person knows that this is wrong somewhere deep down.

#Pascal

I want to come back to two points. One is that the interesting part of your explanation would be, of course, that you would maybe, like, lay out a description of how it is possible that a relatively small group with a lot of money is able not only for themselves to come up with actions that they know are immoral, but how they can then translate that. You know, instead of bribing one person with 20, you can also bribe 20 with one. And, you know, you get a multiplier effect, and then you have a... and so on, and you get a political outcome that you need.

So that would be a very interesting thing. The other one, and that's a much more abstract one, I keep wondering, and I ask that of a lot of people, and I get, also within the university, very different answers. It's like, how important to you is the concept of an observer-independent reality? Exactly. I can't make up my mind, but the more I talk to my physicist friends, the more I go like, yeah, they

are kind of accepting that there might not be one, which puts a huge wrench into the whole idea of objective truth, right? Where do you land on that one?

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah, that's a big one. That's sort of a run at it through the moral question. So any book like mine, or any thinking like mine, you have to eventually take on that big question of something like, where does morality come from? Is there some view from nowhere? Right. Yeah.

#Pascal

Or just the idea of reality. Does an observer-independent reality exist, yes or no? And it is quite important, because if the answer is yes, then the question is, how do we figure it out? If the answer is no, then the question is, how the hell are we ever going to make intersubjective sense out of stuff? And that's, of course, where a big part of the philosophical community then says, like, no, no, no, you cannot go there, because then everything is relative, and this kind of relativism is fatalistic and is poison, right? There must be some form of objective truth, even if it's like the sun and you need to go out of the cave and go and figure it out. But there is a sun. That's the claim. I have no idea.

#Jay Shapiro

I mean, that's such a big question. I have no idea. But I could say that I am, from sort of the moral perspective, I'm convinced that David Hume and his famous distinction—he gave us what's known as the is-ought distinction—where he said, you know, there is no description of the way the universe is that tells us how the universe ought to be. I want that to not be true, but I think it's just fundamentally philosophically infeasible. But it doesn't mean we should just give up on trying to seek the ultimate, I don't know, objective is of the universe. This is the way the universe is from some view-from-nowhere point of view.

But even if we did, it wouldn't tell us how it ought to be, right? We would just be like, well, why is it that is versus any other is? And I think, again, this is maybe my emphasis on the moral creature that we are, which imagines different universes and then tries to figure out which one ought to exist in some... But, you know, where I'm pulling that from, I'll give you sort of, like, my best stab at it, which, uh, one of my childhood heroes was Carl Sagan. And, uh, with this is-ought distinction, you know, he said this line that I go to and I lean on, where he said, "We are a way for the universe to know itself," right?

Which is very beautiful, very Carl Sagan-esque. I'll say it again: We are a way for the universe to know itself. And upon first hearing it, you think, "Oh, wow, this is like poetry and philosophy." It's actually a very sort of basic, neutral is. It doesn't tell you why, but we, this mysterious consciousness thing, which we don't even have an explanation for, somehow, we are of and in the universe. We

are of the universe, and we can look at ourselves, we can look around us, and we can maybe, we're fooling ourselves, but comprehend in some ways, and we can know itself from the inside out.

And that's the is, and it's really beautiful. But what's important about that is there's no obligation in the statement that the universe ought to know itself. There's no ought; it's just an is, right? It doesn't say we are a way for the universe to know itself, therefore the universe ought to know itself. But that little addition that I add seems like kind of the only game in town. And so this is how I kind of jumpstart the question of, I don't know, it's something like you're asking, of this objective viewpoint, or like, is there something outside of itself? Well, I don't know, but that's how I start the kind of moral conversation where it's an opportunity.

What I think Sagan gave us there is noticing that we, this mysterious, we have an opportunity here in and of the universe to know itself morally, objectively, to seek this thing that you're talking about. Does that even exist? I don't know, but we can seek it. And we're not obliged to do it, but it seems like if you forego the opportunity, it's suicide, which you could do. You could just not be in the universe and say, like, "I'm out. I don't want to do the game." But if you stay in the universe, you're sort of accepting the invitation and the opportunity to engage with it.

And of course, there's other, you know—I'm talking suicide there literally, but also maybe philosophically or mentally, to just not sort of engage in that game, turn your brain off, dig into your first-order desires, infinite scroll forever, and, you know, listen to the consequentialist tell you that somehow some better world is emerging where, you know, I don't know, people live longer and diseases are cured, which might be a good thing abstractly, but it's not the kind of deep, engaging flourishing that I think is the opportunity of man. I don't know if that answers the question on the physics one, because I don't really have an answer for that one.

#Pascal

No, it doesn't, but I don't think it can be answered. But let's, for the last 10 minutes or so, let's whittle it down again to the good old, like, the lower level of simple international politics. How, using your insights from that book and about the us-them groups and so on, would we make this useful in order to reduce the violence in international relations? If you're a doctor and I come to you and I say, look, I'm humanity and I have this problem that I keep killing members of my own group, I kind of would like to wind this down. How can your book help us?

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah, no, it's good. I mean, I think what I would like it to do would be to admit defeat to the desire to measure outcomes that really, really matter to us. Like I just said in the last answer, like living longer, curing diseases are, you could say, like objectively good things. I agree. But actually, what can't be—whenever it's going to show up on a graph in international relations or any intervention we do—is something like a sense of justice, and how much a sense of justice adds to, or is a necessary

component to, true human flourishing, right? So that, you know, in some ways, it's like—I'll answer it this way, because you're asking the international relations one. One of my big takeaways is that peace is not something that you go for. I don't think there's such a thing as, like, a peace plan. I think peace is an emergent property of the conditions of justice being genuinely sought, right? Oh, you bring it back to justice.

#Pascal

I mean, justice is an important part of peace. So in that perception.

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah, yeah. I think justice is like the molecules bumping into each other that create the wave of emergence. I think peace is this thing that happens, but it only happens when the conditions of justice are being genuinely sought, which is a big, big problem—philosophical question. And people hate when you get in arguments like this because it sounds so flimsy, and it's like, well, what am I really saying? And I'm like, well, I can't measure justice. I can't show you some graph that shows you justice going up.

#Pascal

But it means you have a pretty large conception of what peace is, right? It's not my little definition, this negative peace. You know, the absence of war is peace, right? If people don't kill each other, you're more or less at peace, even if you're not, like—we are not talking about mental peace and so on—but peace in the sense of, like, at least no killing going on. But your conception is bigger than that, huh?

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah, well, because I think that would be fragile, right? Like, if you just build walls around everyone, like maybe the Israelis want to do, and then suddenly you're... We don't even need walls anymore. We're living in a surveillance state that's getting more and more insane. So the digital walls around everyone that prevent everyone... If we live in some future 1984 version of things where everyone's surveilled and everyone could be debanked and turned off like a robot on the street, and then nobody's killing each other and violent crime goes down to zero and we have these charts, would anyone call that peace? Yeah, I agree with you. Negative killing, we would have this. Almost like... the film WALL-E by Pixar is one of my favorites, where people know the film.

That's a totally peaceful world up there, but it's not a world where I think human flourishing or justice is actually happening. So my conception there would be that it would just be a ticking time bomb because we cannot—we cannot get this torturous second-order desire human thing out of us as much as we wish we could, that that will then, in that world of negative-killing kind of version of

peace, it just won't last. And I don't think anybody from the outside would call it flourishing. And so it would be to try to shift the conversations of international relations, all morality, away from this obsession over security and peace and safety, which I don't think is worth anything. I think what we want is flourishing, moral integrity.

We want to live in a world where we are required less and less and less to injure and sacrifice our moral integrity, to be in that one group and deny that we are, to lie to ourselves that everything is okay or that the rewards are good enough. I think we don't want to be in this world anymore that's requiring that much of us. And that doesn't mean I have some perfect world out there because, on a really philosophical level, if I'm saying, you know, peace is an emergent property of the conditions of justice being sought, I think someone could rightfully argue that existence itself is a form of injustice. I didn't ask to be born. I didn't ask to be here. And God himself put me here, and it's an unjust and unfair world, and I'm angry about it.

So I think, like, people make a lot over, you know, trauma leading to, you know, radicalization or bitterness, but I think it exists. And I'm not just trying to be a curmudgeon. I think there's something really to that, and philosophers have dealt with that for a long time. So I think that's the human condition: to be in a world that we didn't ask to be in and to feel that we have been harmed or there's some injustice in it. And so we will always be, in a Sisyphean way, pushing up against this, this tragedy of the human condition that will always lead to outbreaks of violence and domination or whatever. But we have to be vigilant to push it against ourselves and against other people out there. Again, people...

#Jay Shapiro

I'm a frequent debater on things like Israel-Palestine, and I always get people really frustrated because I don't offer specific solutions or whatever. I give these esoteric, like, well, if justice is being sought, I don't really care what the solution looks like on the ground. It's going to work itself out. It has to be a more deep philosophical engagement with these things. And then I'll just add one more last little thing, which is interesting, again, back to the title and insufficient rewards, is people have sort of, you know, grokked the thesis a little bit that I'm saying. Basically everyone's in the dollar group, whether we know it or not, that requires rewards being given to us in some sort of transactional world, neoliberal world we're in.

I think more and more people, like, when I wrote the book, I was hoping to alert people mostly in the West that, hey, all the rewards that you're getting from the system are actually insufficient if you think about it. Well, by the time, honestly, the book even came out, it's like the rewards are getting less and less, that I barely don't even need to make the argument anymore, where they're like, "Yeah, what rewards? Like, I don't have a job. I don't have any—like, there's nothing coming my way." And so the moral clarity of not having yet been bribed by, like, that actor's choice I gave you—like, no one's getting offered any jobs anymore—so it's a lot easier for them to see the moral problems, be out on the street, say, "I want to change."

What I worry about is if the global elites get scared enough and start redistributing the wealth just a little bit, we'll have to be much more careful to not all just be pulled back right into that one-dollar group and stay quiet and assume that we like turning wooden pegs, even though it's really, really treacherous and boring, and that our little moral infractions are actually not that—we actually like turning wooden pegs. And so, yeah, we're at a weird teetering point right now where I'm telling people, "Hey, the rewards aren't good enough." But a lot of people are just like, "What rewards are you talking about? Like, I'm graduating with four degrees and can't find a job." And I'm like, "Okay, good. Like, at least I don't need to make the argument at that point."

#Pascal

You know, it's a frustrating thing, but the question about how this morality of ours, and especially also what is being constantly shown on TV and in newspapers and so on, and how it influences our psychology, and how it then leads and feeds into the systems that then create as outputs, on one end, that insane level of dying and murder and so on, including half a million dead every year from unilateral coercive measures, including the violent deaths by people getting blown into bits and pieces by bombs and whatnot—I mean, that's a very important one, and I don't think we have figured it out yet. At least if we have, then somebody wrote a really good book and put it far away from the reach of most of us. Jay, people who want to read your book, I think they should first and foremost go out there, buy it, and read it, because it is out, right? It's by Simon & Schuster. It can probably be bought on Amazon, I suppose. Where should people get it from?

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah, I mean, it's available everywhere. Collective Ink put it out under the Iff imprint. And then I also did a ten-part video series for it, which is pretty fun. So it's not exactly an audiobook, but you can find that on my website, What Jay Thinks. It's also on YouTube that you're showing now. The first three are free, so the intro and the preface and chapter one and two. And then the rest is for members only, or you could get it through my website on whatjthinks.com. And it's cool. So I actually, like, there's no, you know, there's no images in the book, but I get to show pictures and talk through a lot of it and tell you about the arguments. So that was actually really fun for me. I still consider myself a filmmaker, so it was fun to do a visual companion series for the book. So if you're a reader or a watcher or both, you can find it everywhere.

#Pascal

And if you want to follow Jay, then go to the Jay Shapiro Dilemma podcast. I have more questions now at the end of this episode than at the beginning, but that means you did a good job. Enjoy philosophical problems.

#Jay Shapiro

Yeah, that's why Socrates got killed. So I'll try to sneak away. But philosophers ask really good questions, and we don't give a lot of answers. But these are the questions that I think really matter.

#Pascal

Just one more little thing, just because my undergrad degree is in philosophy, I must say the philosopher I always had the most respect for is Socrates, because at the moment he was in front of that 500-panel judge kind of thing, and they asked him what kind of punishment do you want? If you choose to pick a good one, you can go free. He said, "My punishment should be you should dine me for free in the best restaurant of Athens." That man believed in what he thought. Anyhow, thank you so much for your time today. Yeah, thanks so much, Pascal.