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Elites like Amazon's Jeff Bezos think they're being philanthropic. But they could do so much more.

"Winners Take All" author Anand Giridharadas says elites only help on their own terms – and never in any way that would endanger their own extreme wealth.

By Eric Johnson | @HeyHeyESJ | Oct 3, 2018, 6:15am EDT

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos | Drew Angerer / Getty Images

When someone like Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos pledges billions to fight homelessness and fund preschool education, that sounds like good news — better for those causes to have money than not. But Bezos and his peers only ever give on their own terms, says "Winners Take All" author Anand Giridharadas.

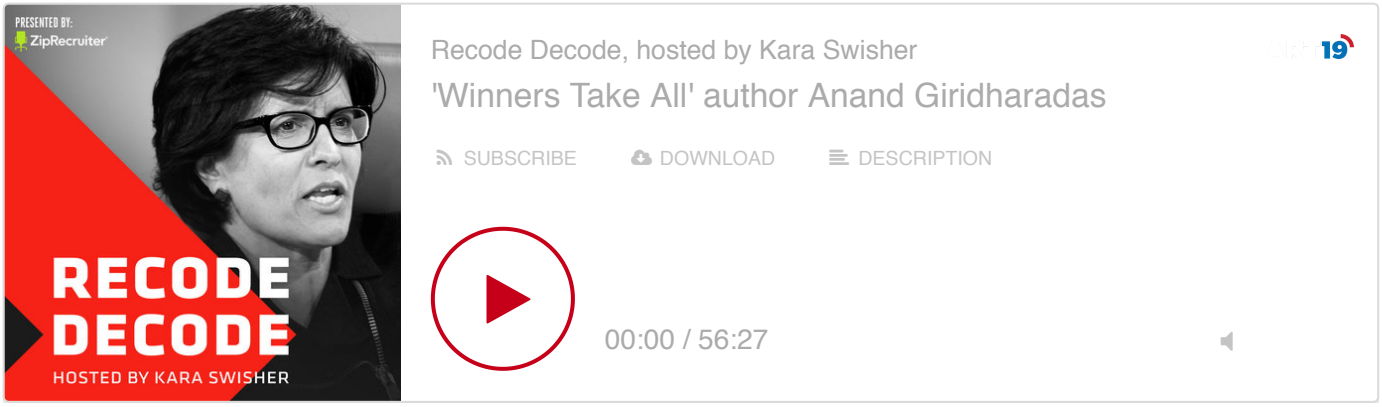
"These people love to ask what they *can* do, they never ask what they have done," Giridharadas said on the latest episode of **Recode Decode, hosted by Kara Swisher**. "How am I involved in this problem? How have my work practices been involved in this? How am I the product of a system of taxation and labor and all these other things that allowed me to make this fortune?"

Giridharadas's new book, which critiques "The Elite Charade of Changing the World," argues that our highly unequal society has fostered "a set of bullshit ideas that we all sort of passively believe" — for example, that alumni of McKinsey and Goldman Sachs should be in charge of charitable foundations, when in fact those organizations have created many of the problems the foundations seek to solve.

"This is just about as disturbing an idea as the idea of hiring arsonists to be firefighters because they, I guess, know a lot about fire?" Giridharadas said.

For people at the top who earnestly want to change the world for the better, he argued that they must be willing to "tak[e] a little bit less" and give back in ways that don't *also* profit them personally or their businesses. Instead of telling women to "lean in" and constantly chasing "innovative" solutions, he said, they should accept the costs of giving everyone maternity leave and paying them more.

"The reality is, we've had a tremendous amount of innovation over the last 40 years," Giridharadas said. "Half of Americans, the bottom half of Americans, 117 million Americans, literally got no more money in their paycheck as a result of 40 years of innovation. We don't have an innovation shortage, we have a progress shortage."



You can listen to **Recode Decode** wherever you get your podcasts, including Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Pocket Casts and Overcast.

Below, we've shared a lightly edited full transcript of Kara's conversation with Anand.

Kara Swisher: Today in the red chair is Anand Giridharadas, the former foreign correspondent and columnist for the New York Times, who has also written for the Atlantic, New Republic and the New Yorker. He's also the author of several books, and his most recent is called "Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World." I love that title. Anand, welcome to Recode Decode.

Anand Giridharadas: I'm so excited to be here.

So, talk to me. I want to talk about your book. Because you were just joking that I said you had a lot of fans. You said as long as you're not a billionaire, essentially, you're not. But they don't like you.

But, let's talk a little bit about your background first and how you got to this. Because this is a topic that I think is really important. The idea. It's great — Bezos just gave the $2 billion to homeless — things like that. What they're doing in the world ... what these very elite and wealthy people are doing.

But let's talk a little bit about how you got to this topic. So, give me your five-second resume. Not five seconds, but how did you get to be interested in this topic?

Well, I always wanted to be a writer, from high school onward, and became a journalist when I was 22 for the New York Times, in India. I had actually grown up in the U.S., in Ohio and Maryland. My parents were Indian immigrants. I got some advice from Jill Abramson, who was a mentor of mine, when I did a little internship at the New York Times.

She was the editor of the New York Times, yeah?

She was not, at the time.

Yeah.

She was like an editor in Washington. Then she gave me an internship when I was in high school. And, after college, she kind of gave me a piece of advice about, "Don't just hang out outside the building, trying to get in. Go out into the world,

see something, have experiences that people don't know about, so you have something to write about."

So, I actually kind of reversed my parents' immigrant journey after college and moved to India, where I'd never lived, and worked for McKinsey, which will come up again in the story, for a year, because it's the only entity in the world that will take a European history major from the University of Michigan and ...

"You're smart, get over here."

... send them to India to go advise a pharmaceutical company. Which I did.

For which you are uniquely qualified.

Well, pretending to know that I knew anything about India or pharma, or ...

Yeah.

But a lot of other people were pretending too, so it's fine. And happily got out of that within a year and became a journalist for the Times, and wrote about this transformation of modern India for four or five years.

At the end of that, wrote a book, and realized that book writing was really what I wanted to do. So, "Winners Take All" is the third of my books now. It originated after I'd come back.

What were the first two?

So, the first one is called "India Calling: An Intimate Portrait of a Nation's Remaking." It was all about ... It's interesting, given where we're gonna go in this conversation. It was all about the transformation of modern India, but told through five families living through it, regular families. The richest man in India was one of them, then the rest were, you know, kind of regular people.

That story was really about one of the most ancient and traditional societies on Earth very rapidly being upended by the opening of market forces. The globalization, the world kind of pouring into India in a very fast period of time. It was a very celebratory book, in a way, about what all of that did to what was for many Indians a very oppressive social structure. All these girls and women who were degraded by their families and told that they could never do anything,

suddenly a job comes into town offering five times [more] money than the father ever made, and the father says, “Okay, maybe I change my mind. Maybe women should work.”

You have these small towns — I wrote about a lot of people in small towns [who] are very interesting to me, who were the nth generation of people told by the caste system in India, “You’re a bricklayer, your dad was a bricklayer, your grandfather was a bricklayer.”

“You will be a bricklayer.”

And you had these kids. One guy said to me, he said, “Do you realize TV is the best education?” I was raised to think the opposite. He said, “Yeah, but where I come from, everything on TV is the best in the world. If you see someone catching an anaconda” — this is the actual example he gave me — “If you see someone catching an anaconda on TV, they’re the best person in the world at catching an anaconda.” And he said, “When you’re from a little village in India and you see the best person in the world at everything, doing everything, it just raises your sights.” And he said, “I knew I had to get out of this town.”

So, I told the stories of people really breaking the fundamental idea of Indian culture, in many ways, which is that you kind of preserve the past and each generation kind of replicates and continues heritage. Instead, all these people were self-inventing, or becoming their own people. It was like this revolution of millions of little Gatsbys, with all of the promise and all of the potential darkness that that entails.

Then, in 2009, I came back to this country. Attempted to go to grad school, and that was not a very good match, so I dropped out of that. I’m one of those dropouts that did not become a billionaire, unfortunately. But, I dropped out nonetheless.

I started to be very interested in this great bifurcation of America. I had told this very optimistic story about India, and about, in some ways, something like the American dream coming to India. Then I came back in 2009, and it seemed like the American dream had deserted America.

It had. That’s exactly when it did, right then.

It was very weird, particularly with that … My family left India precisely because this was a place you could come to dream and realize your hopes. The place they came from wasn't, and this weird reversal just really haunted me, and kind of became …

It's still on a tear.

It is. And with lots of problems, and of …

So is France. But go ahead, we won't get into that.

A lot of places are on a tear. You know, particularly when we're not.

I mean creative and innovatively.

Right. By the way, I grew up in France also for a few years in there, when I was a kid.

I was looking to tell the story of this great bifurcation. Because what I felt very strongly was — and all the stories you do are evidence of this — American decline is not a generalized decline, right? Britain has had a generalized decline, right? Spain has had a generalized decline. The best parts of America, the best institutions, areas, people, are as good as they've ever been. The parts of this country that are high-functioning are as high-functioning as they've ever been. And that's a pretty large part of this country.

It is.

The problem is, the rest of the country has basically descended into being a second-world country instead of a first-world country.

Yeah. I talk about this all the time. The bottom.

And it's maddening. And that's what's really different, I think. So, I became very interested in ways of telling that story. In 2011, I still had a New York Times column and I was looking for a column idea. I know you know the feeling. And I think I was on the day where I needed one. You get a little desperate.

I was on my iPad reading through the New York Times and I saw one of the last news briefs. You know when you get to the national briefings, you're really

scraping the bottom of the barrel for column ideas. I got there, and I see this story that says, “In Texas last night they executed a man who shot some people.” So far, so Texas. The next part of the brief was, “In his final days, one of his victims, Rais Bhuiyan, had been fighting to save his life.” I thought, that’s a little unusual.

So, couple more clicks, that was 9 a.m. By 11 a.m., I knew that was my next project. It became my next book, “The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas.” It’s all about this hate crime in Texas, where a white supremacist … This happened in 2001, the month or so after 9/11. But, what’s so remarkable is, this white supremacist whose ideas — because he left journals and he left all kinds of writings — if you look at his ideas, it is Trumpism distilled. It is the same grievances, the same kind of working-class white guy …

I believed. Yeah, reasons.

… status anxiety inverted onto others. So, he goes around, and he shoots three brown gas station workers over a month after 9/11. Because they’re kind of far apart, people don’t put it together what was going on until it’s all over. Two of them die, an Indian and a Pakistani. The third victim is a Bangladeshi former Air Force officer in his country, who’s come to this country to pursue a better life, even though he was at a very high stature in his country, working in this mini-mart to try to learn IT in college and get in on the tech boom. And he is blinded in one eye. Thirty-nine pellets enter his head; two almost enter his brain, but stopped short. He thinks he’s dying, but he doesn’t die.

Essentially, this victim, Rais Bhuiyan, Muslim immigrant to this country, in the feverish days after 9/11, after regaining his life, rebuilds his life in the most painful, arduous way, layer by layer, job by job, gets a telemarketing job. Gets an Olive Garden job, finds a guy who teaches him IT, eventually ends up making it. Makes six figures in IT.

Ten years after this shooting, he … Well, several years after the shooting, he starts to realize as he’s recovered that when he was dying, or thought he was dying, he had looked up to the sky and said to his god, “If you save me, I’ll dedicate the rest of my life to serving others.” And that he hadn’t done that. He’d taken care of himself for several years, as he understandably had to.

But, now, he was whole, and he was out of medical debt, and he was ready to do that. And so, he thought long and hard about, “How do you do that?” He decided

the thing he wanted to do was forgive, in front of all the world, the guy who shot him.

This is like, Laura Blumenfeld wrote a book called "Revenge" about the guy who shot her father in Israel. It's similar, you should read it. It's great.

So, he forgave this guy.

Yeah.

And then, he sued the State of Texas and the Governor of Texas at the time, Rick Perry. Sued them to prevent them from executing this guy.

Yeah.

In the name of Islam and Sharia Law, which he said requires mercy.

Right.

So, that book was the whole story of that case, and this kind of courtroom drama, at the end of this guy trying to save the life of the guy who shot him in the face.

Wow. To this. So, how do we get here?

After every book, I just try to do ...

Something different.

... something totally different.

This book, I think I was radicalized by the experience of reporting "The True American." I think every book leaves a hangover that you pick up in the next one. The hangover from that one was, I spent a lot of time in these exurbs of Texas. Around Dallas, you know, but hour, two hours, three hours out of Dallas. It's basically these areas that, in many cases, have been essentially obliterated. There's still people there, and there's still things there, but meth, opioids, just the lack of jobs, the total collapse of masculinity in those places. The fact that men are either these hyper masculine ...

It's a lost group of people.

Totally lost.

It's a smaller … To me, I've always thought there's a group at the top that loves the future, leaning into it, some of them are very wealthy, very obscenely wealthy. Then there's a bottom group that are lost, and they're mired in opiates and bad eating and anger and racism, all kinds of things. Then there's a group in the middle, some of whom are slipping down into that, and others understand they need to lean into the future, but they're terrified of it. You know what I mean?

Totally.

That, but it's really a development which has fueled a lot of what's going on.

I remember once, reading something, actually, when I was in India, about how one way to define the health of a society is, is its middle class a poorer version of the rich or a slightly richer version of the poor?

Right. That's a great way to put it.

The culture they share, the quality of their institutions, their church-going … Just various indicators. We are definitely shifting from a society where the middle class was a kind of …

Poorer version.

The rich with less money, to the poor with a little more money.

Right.

Because there's this down-and-out middle.

So there's this overhang. So, what was your point in trying to do this book?

While I was radicalized by seeing all these places that were just … You know, the American dream had just deserted those places a long time ago. I, at the same time, was invited into a benevolent secret society, called the Aspen Institute. There was this thing called the Henry Crown Fellowship of the Aspen Institute.

There is. It's not secret, but go ahead.

It's like an open secret society.

Yeah. *I've* heard of it, so it's not that secretive.

That proves nothing.

Well, I care for that stuff.

And here was this group of people. The whole purpose of it was to bring together young leaders with an idea to making them solve some of the most urgent problems of our time. The world's most intractable problems.

Right.

At first, you thought, "Great. Wow. Here I am, seeing some of these very big problems, and here's this group of people doing that", and we'd meet. It was mostly business people. That was the idea. I was kind of let in along with a couple other people.

It seemed great, we bonded. You know, you put a bunch of people together in a seminar room.

In Aspen.

Things are good. As I kind of got deeper into that world, I went to the Aspen Ideas Festival, and this and that, start to see things are sponsored by Monsanto and Pepsi, when you're trying to make the world a better place. The Koch brothers sponsored a building ...

Yeah, I noticed that. Yeah.

... where you're discussing the deepening of democracy. Goldman Sachs sponsors the summer reunion about reducing inequality and fighting for justice. You start to wonder, "What am I really participating in here? Am I trying to break down these problems or am I actually part of how we're shoring up these problems?" And, "Am I being used by this whole ..."

You are, but go ahead.

Yeah. Well, hence the book. So, I was in that fellowship for a couple years.

You were in a bite-the-hand-that-feeds-you mood.

Yeah. Sure. They asked me to give a talk there. They asked me to give a talk about the hate-crime book. I said, "Yes." Then, I emailed them, and I said, "It's gonna be a slightly different talk than that." They said, "That's fine." Well, then I, you know, interpreted "slightly" in my own way.

So I included in one paragraph about the hate-crime thing, and then I decided to speak from the heart to a room full of millionaires and billionaires and trustees of this institute, and my fellow Fellows and people at every major company in America — Facebook and Google and Goldman and whatever — all in that room. And I just said, "Look, rich people in our time all think that they're changing the world. They're making it a better place. They're trying to do good. I think we need to confront the fact that we, in this room, may literally be the problem."

Right.

And we talk about doing a little more good, but we never talk about doing less harm. We talk about creating little programs for people. We don't talk about just paying people more. We talk about women leaning in, but we lobby against — "we" meaning these people's companies — lobby against maternity leave in Congress.

So, there's a lot of generosity, and talk of generosity, that happens with rich people these days, in this age of extreme inequality, but there's not a lot of talk of justice. And generosity and justice are actually not the same.

That is a very good point.

Well, you can imagine what happens.

Let's talk about specific things. You talked about how you got to this idea. You had written about a range of different things, but when you were here at this Aspen Institute, which I can just, my skin crawls when I think about that room. I've been in that room.

The room where it doesn't happen.

Where it doesn't happen. And where they also think that they do. When I first came to Silicon Valley, I wrote a piece for the Wall Street Journal saying,

“Things I can’t stand the tech people saying to me.” “Changing the world” was at the very top of the lists. “We’re here to change the world!” I’m like, “No, you’re here to make money. You’re here to make a product. You’re here to …” You never would see a cigarette manufacturer, not cigarette manufacturer, just any … Come to make peanut butter. “We’re here to change the world through peanut butter.”

Correct.

Or Wall Street people do it. It was such an arrogant way of looking at … Basically, it was just capitalism, as far as I was concerned.

Yeah.

So, I did a funny.

Can I just say a note on that? But, this culture has spread so much, though, that sometimes their direction is reversed. I have some friends who have a company that makes replacement shoelaces. These little plastic shoelaces called Hickies. Great little product. They tell a story. Every time they talk to the press and they’re trying to pitch a story, the press will ask them, “So, how are you changing the world? How are you making a difference?” And they will say, “No no no, we’re just a shoelace company. It’s literally just shoelaces.” And it’s actually the media that now expects a startup to have a story about civilizational uplift.

Yeah, I don’t want them to change the world. I really just don’t want them to hurt it. That’s my …

Correct.

That’s my only interest is stop hurting it. Or if you’re hurting it, stop and fix it.

I think it’s no accident that the company perhaps most associated with the narrative of changing the world in our time actually ended up being the first company in American history to compromise an American election.

And that would be Facebook. Yes, and we’ll be talking about that. Talk about some of the concepts you have in “Winners Take All.” It is a charade. It is a charade. They do want to talk about it and they go to Davos or wherever the

heck they want to go to to do this. Talk about what that means. Give me some good examples of "taking all," because they do.

One of the things that drives me crazy, and I've done lots of interviews with various people, but when they do interviews with me and they're like, "We wanted to fix this and we're really sorry. It's hard to have this …" They don't want to take the power … They don't want to … They pretend they don't have the power they have, almost continually.

Correct. I have a whole chapter about that called "Rebel Kings in Worrisome Berets."

Yeah, and I was like, "You took the money. You ruined the media business. You didn't mind doing any of that and now you don't want to take responsibility for it." Talk about these.

Correct. So let's start with that one. I have a chapter in the book called … So the whole book is, although it's making the argument that I'm making to you, it actually consists of stories of people in this world grappling with these dilemmas.

Right. Oh, they grapple. Grapple is a good word.

And trying to figure out how to do right while also, frankly, clinging to their privileges. One of the chapters is about the Summit at Sea cruise ship.

Ugh. God. Okay, yep.

Three thousand tech entrepreneurs, one Norwegian cruise ship and just so much world-changing possibility.

Changing the world one cruise at a time.

Right before we board the ship, there's this email that some people get that say, "In a few days, something transformational is going to be born from the sky and the moon and it might just change history. We may not see the full effect now but that's the case with any great shift, any seismic shift amongst the plates of planet earth." That's the welcome email.

Yeah, I know.

We get on this ship and I tell the story of these people and Shervin Pishevar, this VC, shady guy …

Pishevar. Pishevar.

Whatever.

I know Shervin.

What do you think of Shervin?

I'm not going into it, but go ahead. He's a complex character.

Yeah. He is giving this talk and I kind of describe his talk. But the thing that really struck me on this ship about these world changers is I actually started to feel for and started to understand why they deny their power, which I think is such a crucial issue.

Absolutely. They push away power, and you can't.

Yes. They have this … I think John F. Kennedy used this idea, or it was in an Arthur Schlesinger book about the Kennedys, this idea of folk memory. That we often have these folk memories that are not our own memories, but are just kind of passed down. There's a folk memory in tech of being a rebel, of being a hacker, of being a tinkerer on the outside.

Right. Sort of the Apple. Remember they had the pirate flag in front of the …

All of that. And I think if you're like 30 and working in tech, that just was never the actual story of your life.

Never. No.

But there are some people who did live that story.

They're giant, cosseted babies.

Right.

But go ahead.

But I think if you were in that early group, and you were up against, I don't know, Walmart or IBM or GE or Kodak, whatever …

There was, for a moment.

Right? You could feel like you were these little rebels up against The Man. I think the problem is they've clung to that folk memory even as they won. So the analogy I use is, you see on the news these war-torn countries where you have a rebel army that is advancing on the capitol. And you've got these rebel commanders in their berets sitting in the back of pickup trucks. They've got one gun, holding another gun. Sometimes the rebels win. Sometimes the rebels actually make it to the palace. They become the new king, they become the president. The old guy's taken off in a helicopter to some exile country. And it's always a bad sign if the rebel, when they ascend to the palace, keeps their beret on.

Yes, because … You're talking about Fidel Castro-ish, kind of.

Castro, Mugabe, Saddam, they all kept the beret. And what does it mean when you keep the beret? It means even though you've arrived …

It's a romantic version of yourself.

Right. But you've arrived. You now actually are power. You're not the rebel. You're the establishment now and you haven't processed your arrival.

Of who you are.

You haven't accepted who you are.

It's like being constantly on a campaign rather than governing.

It's like Trump's rallies.

Yeah. He just can't govern. He just wants to continue on the campaign that he already won. Someone wrote me a tweet the other day, it's like, "You're part of the elite and you're running everything and we're going to take power from you." I'm like, "I don't know the last time you looked, but all of Congress and the presidency is run by y'all and I don't have power. My people don't have power for sure." It was really interesting that they

continued. I was like, "Look up and see that you have the power and you're the one doing the damage, not me." It was really interesting. But that is a thing.

So in tech, it's the look. At least we're talking about tech, particularly, and I think you're right. They cling onto that concept of themselves, it's the juvenile clothes …

Everything.

It's the, "We're simple," even as they have planes.

It's hard to hear Zuck call Facebook a company. He always calls it a community.

Yeah, he does that.

Like they're like a drum cir —

I call it a nation state.

Yeah. That's starting to get closer to the reality.

Oh, it is close to the reality.

It's not just a verbal tic or a clothing thing. They understand completely what they are doing. By not being seen as power, they get to behave like babies.

Well, here's what's interesting. When you say that he calls it a community, it means he's just one of the members. That's why he's doing it.

Correct.

And I'm always like, "You're running …" One of the things they were talking about is, "Well, he's not responsible." I'm like, "He has full … He controls the shares, he's the CEO and he has $64 billion. I'm going with him who has the power." I don't know … It's not a community. It's a community run by one. It's a community of one.

You and I both know this. Forget what they say publicly. You and I both speak to people privately in that company. They will tell you that, yeah, they could make less money and have way more people policing abuse …

Yes. 100 percent.

Way more people doing security, it would just cost something. Part of the whole fantasy that I'm trying to dismantle in this book is, a lot of social problems just involve the winners taking a little bit less.

Right. Exactly.

Because that has been ruled out, we have a lot of problems. So the ideology …

The first one is the idea that they are still the rebels. That they are still the aggrieved. That they are still … which you [wrote about], this guy thought that same thing, that brown people were taking away his rights, even though it's not untrue.

Right.

So that they're still the rebels. All right.

But I think the overall gov … So I describe in the book a place called MarketWorld. One word. Capital M, capital W. And MarketWorld is a kind of overlapping complex of people and institutions that are trying to do well by doing good. That are trying to make a killing and make a difference. That are trying to have a win-win with everything.

So that is people at Goldman Sachs trying to do green bonds to change the world, while also maybe pushing Exxon stock. That is the Silicon Valley folks we've talked about. That is big philanthropy. That is trying to take money that was made hurting people and then turn it around to help, often, those same people.

The Carnegie effect.

The Carnegie effect. I mean, you have the number of banks you have right now that are, you know, "$500 million to revitalize America's urban areas." You literally were just fined $13 billion, $16 billion for causing millions of foreclosures in this country because you willfully, fraudulently caused a financial crisis that just literally killed people around the world from lost jobs and lost healthcare and any number of other things. And, 'Oh wow, you did a $500 million of revitalization, but you also got $10 billion from the tax cuts.'

And you have this whole dynamic where the winners of our age deeply believe that they can help people. They can fight for others. But only on their terms. They're willing to fight for equality and justice in any way they can, except by stepping off of people's backs. They're not willing to have an education system that funds public schools equally and adequately because that would cost rich people a lot of money. They're willing to tell women to "lean in" because that's actually free. You can actually just say, "See, I just did it. I just did it. I just literally just did … I just said lean in and that's a social policy." Actual social policy that would actually empower women based on, what, like 15 other countries …

Maternity leave.

Maternity leave, childcare tax credits, laws to prevent everybody from being groped in the office every day, etc. These are not mysteries. This is not like going to space. We know.

One is having lack of self-awareness, exactly who you are, which is the bad person or the dangerous person.

Yes. The other is the insistence on the win-win. That the only kind of social change that's acceptable is the kind of social change that also benefits the powerful.

Give me an example of that.

The lean-in thing is a great example of that. Where you say, "The best way to empower women is telling them to lean in. Not doing the kind of social policy that's going to cost my company a lot of money. I don't want to do that. Why would I want to do that? That's too expensive."

Or, on this public schools thing, "Let's do a charter school here." Every rich person wants to do a charter school. How many of them want to fight for … Why do we fund public schools according to the home value of people's parents' home? Why do we do that? That's what we do in this country. It's barbarism. Can you explain to a 6-year-old why the quality of their education correlates with how nice their family's home is?

It depends on the real estate.

It's an insane idea, right? But people don't fight on that issue because what would happen? The homes in Marin and Greenwich and Westchester would all … The home values would go down if they didn't get to have these much better public schools than everybody else.

Right. Exactly.

So we don't do that kind of change. And then you also have — and this is a kind of third issue — you have this newly ascendant idea over the last many years that you kind of need a McKinsey, Goldman Sachs mind to fight poverty.

Right. The business people will take care of it, right?

Because they … Spreadsheets! I mean, spreadsheets. Come on. I mean, PowerPoint.

Yeah, it's interesting, you were just mentioning it. I remember one of the better speeches by Barack Obama, finally, was when he said, "Tech people think there's always a tech solution to things and maybe government doesn't have a … There's no tech solution to poverty. There's no tech solution."

Correct. I think he said something about …

They don't lend themselves to this.

I think he said this line in that same speech, like, "The stuff you guys do is easy. That's why you're fast and efficient at it. Governing 325 million people is hard and it's not supposed to be fast."

Right. It's not supposed to make money.

It's about …

I was arguing with someone recently about, "The government caused that." I said, "It's not supposed to make money. It's really not. It's not a profit institute. It's supposed to cost money if we're going to do it." And, obviously, inefficient is one thing, but it was sort of a mentality that we have that if it doesn't make money … That concept. Go ahead.

So you have this idea that the people, the architects of our winners-take-all economy are the people best positioned to address the injustices of our winners-take-all economy. So now foundations bend over backwards to hire ex-McKinsey, ex-Goldman Sachs people to run their equality program. And this is just about as disturbing an idea as the idea of hiring arsonists to be firefighters because they, I guess, know a lot about fire?

They do. They do know a lot about fire.

So you end up having … I write about a guy in the book named Sean Hinton. He's a really thoughtful guy about this issue. Worked at Goldman and McKinsey and then ended up at the Open Society Foundations, working for George Soros. And he calls it the "trying to solve the problems with the tools that caused it" issue. And he's talking about himself.

But on the other hand, he knows. He's a smart, capable guy and it's probably better that he's doing this than just staying in banking. But one of the things that happens is when the language of our social problems is reformatted for the operating system of business people's minds, the nature of the problem is changed. We stop actually talking about justice and rights and power. We start talking about scale and efficiency and leveraging synergies. Those are not just different words. That actually is a different diagnosis.

What rich people don't like to do when they solve problems is kind of talk about who did it. There's always this thing when I'm at every event I do, it's always like, "Okay, great. Yeah, yeah. But what are the solutions? Let's just move forward."

Oh, man. You know I just had this long argument on a podcast with Mark Zuckerberg about this, right?

Yeah.

I kept saying, "And how do you feel about what you did?"

Oh my. That feeling, that was painful.

That was painful. Four times.

You had to do it.

How many times did he do it? How many?

Oh, gosh. I don't even know how many you must have edited out.

Four. No. No, no, we didn't edit anything. It was four times that I asked the same question.

He couldn't do it.

"How do you feel about the deaths in Myanmar and India based on your creation?" "What we really want to do is fix the problem. We really want to get to solutions. I think getting to solutions is important."

I was like, "Yeah, I got that. But what was your fault here? What did you do wrong and how do you feel about that? How do you feel about people dying? Right? Dying?" "Well, you know, solutions are what is important to us. I think whenever there's a problem, there's a solution."

"Well, you caused the problem, so how do you feel about causing that problem?" And it went like that, it was four to five times. Finally, he said to me, let me just say, he goes, "What do you want me to say?" I said, "I want you to say, 'I'm sorry and I cannot believe that what I made did this and I feel sick to my stomach.'" I said, "You might start there. Not to give you any cues about what it was."

But the point I wanted to make there is they can't — and Mark is a lovely person, let me just say. He can't get there and they cannot get to that idea that they are at fault or take responsibility and contemplate what went wrong. They don't want to do that. That part, they don't want to do when it's important to the solution, as far as I'm concerned. Go ahead.

I think, when I was listening to that, my observation was ... And I had the same feeling watching that Elon Musk ...

The smoking one?

The spliff one. I love to live in a world where there are all kinds of different people. But I think we have to, just watching these guys, we have to acknowledge that they tend to be a very particular kind of person. Particular kind of man. And

they're often these kind of boy-men who are not particularly developed in a lot of ways. They're not cultivated.

Well, I say they don't have humanities courses.

Right. It's interesting how many of them-

That was a column I wrote.

Yeah.

No, I say he should have taken more … He missed the humanities, the ethics, and …

Right. It's interesting. They all drop out, right? That's fine to have such people who kind of are not able to relate to other human beings and not able to connect to their emotions. It's great to have them in the world. But to have so many of them essentially, now, in charge of what have become, basically, the locomotives of human history now, these various platforms, is really, really problematic.

The kind of man you just described in that anecdote essentially deciding what kind of media we have, deciding how secure our elections are, deciding what abuse women have to encounter online or don't. For that man, who's maybe less feeling a human being than many people you've met in your life, it feels really bothersome to me.

We're here with Anand Giridharadas. He's the author of a new book called "Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World." It's also *charade*. Which one do you like? Do you like *charade* or charade?

I think *charade* is classier, but charade is more grounded.

Charade.

It depends whether you're a winner or not.

What do we do to change this? Give me a few more things they do. They always are the solutions-based rather than the problems-based. And when you bring up the problems, which I think is really interesting, they're always saying, "You're really negative."

Correct.

That always happens to me.

I make the following analogy to people, which is, some kinds of problems are like engines that need to be tweaked. Right? And there are many problems that are analogous to that. You turn this dial, you turn this, you tighten that and you fix the engine. Other types of problems are like crime scenes. A crime scene is a very different kind of problem than an engine that's not working.

Okay, I want to hear this.

You don't show up at a crime scene and say, "You know what? Let's just move forward. What's done is done. Let's just solve this." Right?

Yeah.

That's a preposterous response to a crime scene.

It is.

A crime scene it's entirely for the larger sake of preventing it — for various forward-leaning goals — you have to first look backwards. "Who did this? How did this happen? Where is the person who did this? How do we help the person to whom this has been done?"

Well, part of my argument is, if you look at some problems we have in our society and if you say we have a public school system where the teachers, if they were matched better with the neediest students, you'd have better outcomes. Yeah, that's an engine problem. Great. Awesome. You can have an algorithm do that. Awesome. Great. Very happy. Win-win.

But a lot of social problems are more like a crime scene. What men have done to women over hundreds of years is more analogous to a crime scene than an engine that's out of whack. What white people have done to black people in this country is more analogous to a crime scene than to an engine. Frankly, the American economy that has allowed the very few to corner almost all the benefits of the future for the last 30 or 40 years for itself, that's more like a crime scene than an engine that's out of whack.

So, *if* you are addressing yourself to the problem of equality of women or rights for African Americans, how do you actually build an economy that's more inclusive? Just getting in a solving mode is a kind of posture that favors power.

Of course it does.

It has a well-known power bias, and actually being interested in excavating, having a curiosity about … How did this happen?

You know what's interesting? In tech, at least, it's because they don't want to say, "Well, the failure was a failure. Now, let's move on." The moving on, this is always, "Let's move on." One of the things that I've been pressing about is, "Why did you make it this way?" I want to know why you made it this way and how we can stop, or maybe you need to remake it that way.

I just had a really interesting podcast with Nicole Wong, who is one of the lawyers involved, and she finally had said, "Here's what we did, and here's why I was wrong, and here's what they need to do. Here's how we have to create the pillars in all new ways." At first, I was like, "Thank you. Thank you for the explanation, that cogent explanation." Because when you start to sort of press them on how it got that way, that's where it gets super messy.

There's a lot of passive voice in Silicon Valley.

Mm-hmm. "Mistakes were made."

"Our platform was hacked," or whatever.

No, it wasn't hacked. It was built that way.

Well, right. Right. But it's not that even it was built that way. Someone built it that way, and you have to bet there were meetings at Facebook where there was someone in the room who said, "You know what? I think we should actually have 50,000 more security people. This election is way too … We're seeing this stuff come in. Look, it'll cost a billion dollars, but we have to do it." Right? And someone said that at some meeting, I presume.

No one did. No one said that at that meeting.

You think?

No. I don't know. I think they never even thought of it.

You don't think there's a dissident along the way?

No. There's no dissidence there. They're compromising and cohesive in a way that's disturbing. I ask that a lot. I actually asked Eliot Schrage, who was the head of policy at an event. I raised my hand, and he's like, "Oh, no." And I go, "Yeah, 'oh no' is right. Why aren't there any irritants in the room at Facebook? Why didn't anybody say this was a problem? You always brag about your cohesion. I don't want your cohesion. I want to know who irritated, who was the irritant. Or who said no, and who said …" I don't think that person existed at these places because it is a lot about going along. Even though they act like rebels, they tend to fall in line with each other in a way that's … or fall into violent agreement about things.

And I think that's the kind of insight that you get to when you actually are willing to ask backward-looking questions. When you're actually willing to sit with a problem and not just …

Well, it goes against the positivity that the elites like, the relentless positivity. And one of the things, I think asked Sheryl Sandberg onstage, "Who got fired for this?" She couldn't answer. "Well, we don't look at it that way." I'm like, "Why? People get fired for all types of things when they fuck up, and it seems like this is a fuck-up. Looks like a fuck-up to me."

And wouldn't answer, couldn't … Not wouldn't, couldn't. They don't think like that, which was really interesting. "Well, that's not how we wanna … Well, let's just move forward with this," and it was really interesting. To me, the concept of "The bill always comes due" never occurs to people.

Correct. I mean, I think part of what I wanted to try to investigate, and you say moving forward in our way …

Yeah. How do we change this?

I think a lot of this is actually held together by a bullshit culture and a set of bullshit ideas that we all sort of passively believe. That some of them really believe.

All right. What are the bullshittiest?

In Europe, no one thinks Mark Zuckerberg's changing the world.

Yeah, they don't.

Right? And I don't think it's an accident that he gets … that tech people get multi-billion dollar fines in Europe because they're just seen as companies. They're seen the same way Heinz Ketchup is a company. And that's a healthy way to look at them. They're not awful people who should be banned, they're just normal companies. But our culture makes us look at them as changing the world.

Yeah, that has changed though here too, I think.

You know, then there's the … I think it's starting to change here in a way that's really great. You know, then with innovation. Everything's innovation, innovation, innovation. Government needs to innovate more, and everybody wants to chase this whole innovation thing.

The government does need to innovate more, but go ahead.

But I'm much more interested in the word "progress." The reality is, we've had a tremendous amount of innovation over the last 40 years. Half of Americans, the bottom half of Americans, 117 million Americans, literally got no more money in their paycheck as a result of 40 years of innovation. We don't have an innovation shortage, we have a progress shortage.

Couple less at the top.

Right?

Yes.

And so actually figuring out, not how do you get more and more innovation. We're good on innovation. We're very bad at converting innovation into progress. *That's* an important problem that people should be working on. Thinking about how do you, as a winner, not insist on win-wins? How do you actually get out of the way of the public trying to solve its problems in ways that may hurt you? And the Bezos thing is interesting because …

He just gave … Explain.

He just announced, long-awaited announcement, about what he's going to do philanthropically. The world's richest man hasn't really been in this game in a big way, and this is kind of, in some ways, I think the significance is, this is the first mega-giver to decide his plans after the tech backlash has kind of arrived.

It's called the techlash.

The techlash. Sorry. Yeah. I forgot that hashtag. And after the reckoning and philanthropy that my book is kind of a small part of. There's a whole larger reckoning that has been happening after that, and so he announces he's going to spend $2 billion on homelessness and early education. He's going to build a network of Montessori Schools, full-scholarship schools, and he's going to give money to organizations that are doing a good job fighting homelessness.

Now, both good causes. I think the challenge is, this is a man who, when he was thinking about building Amazon, was a total daredevil and irreverent and bold and brash and didn't care what investors or anybody else thought and built something transformative. My hope for him, since he's new to this game, would be that he would be as transformative in thinking about giving.

What that would mean is a few things. One, that instead of just creating a little project here and there giving these things, he would actually first start by looking at himself. How am I … These people love to ask what they *can* do, they never ask what they have done, right?

That's a really good way to put it.

How am I involved in this problem? How have my work practices been involved in this? How am I the product of a system of taxation and labor and all these other things that allowed me to make this fortune?

And yes, fine. What's done is done. I'm here now, I want to give, in that forward-looking way, but if I can give in ways that actually, frankly, mitigated some of those systemic issues, if I could give in a way that actually helped us figure out how we attack the companies more efficiently, if I could give in ways that actually strengthened collective bargaining in unions.

I mean, imagine if he gave a billion dollars to an organization like the Workers Lab in Oakland that is actually trying to figure out what's the future of collective bargaining, what's the future of unions, and how do you give workers more power? That is different for me than just giving money to a homeless organization that's ...

Sure.

Right? It's not just treating symptoms, you would be pushing towards solving a problem at the root for everybody..

That would be a great thing to give money to. Would they take his money?

I don't know. That's a good question.

I don't think they'd take his money.

That's a good question.

They should take his money.

And then no strings attached, right?

Right.

You're not on the board, you're not leading their work.

There you go. Good luck.

It's not called the Bezos Workers Lab. It's just supporting organizations that are doing the work of, frankly, challenging the very system atop which you stand. Now, that is a hard thing I'm asking people, but I'm an idealistic person, and I think ...

Is anybody doing that, from your perspective?

You know, I think probably the best example, there are folks who give to ProPublica, for example. David Callahan, who writes a lot about philanthropy, wrote a good and somewhat critical review of my book the other day. He was talking about the people who give to ProPublica, the people who give to Mother

Jones. I mean, those are people who are funding investigative work that is not very friendly to rich people, so that's an example of doing that.

Right.

I mean, in some ways, George Soros has been interesting. He does not do this win-win giving, necessarily. He gives to a lot of social justice organizations that are thorns in the side of rich people.

George Soros.

And they investigate the hell out of his friends, probably. But I think there's some more unsung people. The people I … some philanthropists in California who are spending their money trying to make our census count more accurate.

Mm-hmm.

Right? This is the kind of thing, it's not sexy, it's not cool. It's not like Zuckerberg making some announcement that he's going to end all the diseases. But the reason I like the census thing is what they're doing, they're using private money to count people and find where people … people sometimes live on top of a building or in an alley. The government doesn't have that listed as an address, right?

What the government allows you to do is to submit … private people can submit addresses, like on top of a roof or an alley, that they may not know about, and then the government will then go check those places if they check out. And so some of these philanthropists in California are privately financing this kind of walk-around of various places.

In order to do a better census.

Now, that's an amazing example. It's a private gift. It's private philanthropy, but what is it feeding into? A better public sphere. It's feeding into government working better, counting more people, being able to give resources to more people. And if that kind of effort succeeds, it actually comes at the expense of the winners because it means you're …

And also, it doesn't necessarily involve them.

No.

They just give us …

They're not running.

At one point, I was talking to someone who was very wealthy, and they're like, "I don't want to do this," and I was like, "Just give the fucking money and shut up. Just give your money. Stop." Like, they all do want to involve themselves and talk about it incessantly, and that's just …

One of the people I talk about in the book is Emmett Carson, who is now out as the Silicon Valley Community Foundation guy.

Yeah.

And he said something very interesting. When he was at other foundations, he always talked about social justice and inequality, and those were his buzzwords. He gets out to the Valley, it's made very clear to him, very quickly — I mean, he's a counselor to Zuck and all these others — it's made very clear to him very quickly, drop this language. Social justice doesn't work, inequality … You gotta stop talking like this. Talk about opportunity.

And I said, you know, "What did you understand by having to cater and dance around these people's needs in the Valley?" And what he basically explained to me was they really want to help people, as long as, as you say, they're driving the ship. The help is voluntary. It's not the government compelling them to give money for programs the government decides about. It's *them* deciding where their money goes. They like to feel useful. They like to feel involved.

Yeah.

Which basically is in our …

And not insulted.

But can I tell you what those are the values of? Those are the values of a feudal culture.

Yep.

This is feudal giving, right? I mean, to go back to where we started, when I used to travel to India as a child, the thing that strikes you is all these affluent families, they all have servants. And they all tell you, “Oh, our servant is just like family to us.” The problem is the servant sleeps on the floor.

And they’re the servant.

And they’re the servant. They sleep on the floor. There’s no restrictions on their hours. They’re not subject to any labor laws. Their passport is usually kept in a lock and key somewhere, which is the definition of human trafficking. That they’re given just a plate of rice every day, and there’s this …

You know, when their roof caves in in the state of Bihar or Madhya Pradesh, you’ll send $300 or $400 for them to repair their roof and it’s very generous. There’s a lot of generosity in that world. There’s not a lot of justice. And what no one thinks in that world to do is to say, “Gosh, we shouldn’t be living in this equation that we’re living in.”

Right, yeah.

And that actually is the same thing, that many of the winners in America get that kind of relationship where they’re happy to throw down scraps to the powerless, but they don’t want to live in a world in which they’re not powerless anymore.

Right. Absolutely. That’s a very good way to end. So, if you had to know where it’s going, is this just going to continue or has there been a reckoning?

I think … Allow me to make the most enthusiastic endorsement of Donald Trump that I can make.

Oh, no. Okay.

Which is this. I think Donald Trump rose to power because so many people felt that elites don’t care about them.

Agree.

You know, were talking out of two sides of their mouth. I think he then became the most fake-change president of all the … despite all the fake change that preceded him. But I actually have hope that he is so bankrupt, he is so barren of

any kind of concern for people, and he is so animated by this fake-billionaire-savior impulse, that I actually have hope that he will discredit the idea of the billionaire savior once and for all.

Yeah.

And that, you know, our Bloomberg and Oprah fantasy, I just hope that'll all pass when he passes, and that he's the kind of president in American history who sometimes becomes the spark for a real shift. I could see, and my hopeful scenario would be, I could see a world in which Donald Trump becomes the spark of a new age of reform in American life, the way we had already 100 years ago, where we stopped expecting Rockefellers and Carnegies to make it rain and we actually built an FDA and an interstate highway system and the New Deal and rural electrification.

That's a really good plan.

You know, a slightly more generous way to think about where we are in America is that we're in a time of mismatch. Private innovation and capacity to do stuff has just far outstripped our capacity to make sense of it and order it. We have Uber drivers, but we just have no idea what that labor market is and how to protect people from it. We have Airbnb, we just don't know safety in a ...

We've invented a lot of things that we haven't brought order to, which is exactly where we were 100 years ago. I think we just needed an age of great public energy, young people going into public service instead of to Goldman Sachs and McKinsey, and a great wave of public building and public rebuilding. Who better than Donald Trump to remind us the billionaires won't save us?

That's a perfect thing to end on. Anand, this has been great. This is Anand Giridharadas. He's the author of a new book called "Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World," and I've gotta tell you, it's so nice to hear from you. I feel like I'm by myself saying, "You need to pay for this. You broke this. You broke it, you pay, you buy it," kind of thing. I appreciate it.

Thank you so much for having me.

And I think everybody should read it. It's really important to start thinking about this, especially you Silicon Valley jackasses. Come on. We love you, but

not that much. Thanks for coming on the show.