

Duquesne University

Duquesne Scholarship Collection

Hallowed Secularism

The Collective Works of Bruce Ledewitz, Adrian
Van Kaam C.S.Sp. Endowed Chair in Scholarly
Excellence and Professor of Law

9-12-2019

September 12, 2019: Bends Toward Justice Podcast Debuts This Week

Bruce Ledewitz

Duquesne University, ledewitz@duq.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism>



Part of the [Constitutional Law Commons](#), and the [Law and Philosophy Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2019). September 12, 2019: Bends Toward Justice Podcast Debuts This Week. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/1262>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Collective Works of Bruce Ledewitz, Adrian Van Kaam C.S.Sp. Endowed Chair in Scholarly Excellence and Professor of Law at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hallowed Secularism by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection. For more information, please contact beharyr@duq.edu.

Title: Bends Toward Justice Podcast Debuts This Week

Date: 2019-09-12T05:30:00.000-04:00

9/12/2019—Recent related projects have limited my postings here. There will be announcements about all that in the coming weeks and months. Meanwhile, the podcast series Bends Toward Justice debuts this week, I hope, on Soundcloud. Here are the program notes:

“Bends Towards Justice” is an original podcast created and hosted by Duquesne University School of Law Professor Bruce Ledewitz. The five episode pilot series is available now at <https://soundcloud.com/duquesnelawpodcast>. The podcast asks a simple, but fundamental question—do we agree with Dr. King that arc of the moral universe bends toward justice? The participants in this series provide a variety of perspectives on that question. The goal of the podcast is for the listener to understand what is at stake in this question and to come to a decision.

Episode 1: Introduction to themes in Martin Luther King’s concept that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice.

Bruce Ledewitz is a professor of law at Duquesne University School of law. He specializes in constitutional law, law and religion and law and the secular. He is the author of *American Religious Democracy: Coming to Terms with the End of Secular Politics* (Praeger 2007), *Hallowed Secularism: Theory, Belief, and Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan 2009) and *Church, State, and the Crisis in American Secularism* (Indiana University Press 2011). Ledewitz received his undergraduate degree from Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and his J.D. from Yale Law School

For Ledewitz, America is a society fallen into nihilism. For many Americans, there are no objective sources of meaning and history has no shape. But nihilism has arisen almost accidentally, out of a failure of the culture to defend truth. This podcast is a first step in challenging our nihilism.

Jesse Francis, who interviews Ledewitz in Episode 1, is a graduate of Duquesne Law School, where he and Ledewitz had an opportunity to explore the implications of nihilism. Francis is an associate in the Dickie McCamey law firm in Pittsburgh.

Episode 2: A conversation with Michael Shermer: Despite the discourse, at present, humanity is kinder and gentler.

Michael Shermer uses Dr. King's image of "the moral arc" to express his view that there is moral progress and that humanity has become better over time--kinder, gentler, more inclusive--and that this does express a truth of the universe. Recent trends that suggest decline are temporary and not an existential crisis in America and the West. The moral universe or right and wrong is real, but is not a metaphysical entity. It is an expression of enlightened humanity. Though not himself religious, Shermer has a great appreciation for what religion has done and does for moral progress. Like all things, religion is not all good or all bad. The issue for Shermer is what beliefs lead to actions that promote the flourishing of sentient beings. Those beliefs need to be encouraged. That overall movement is the moral arc for Shermer.

Episode 3: A conversation with Carter: If the universe doesn't care about your purpose, does that mean life is meaningless?

In 2017, Joseph Carter wrote an op-ed for the New York Times as a graduate student in philosophy at the University of Georgia entitled, "The Universe Doesn't Care About Your Purpose." He wanted to explore the tension between the world of purpose that we see and the scientific reality of mechanistic forces that actually order things.

As a materialist, Carter argues that there are no intrinsic purposes in reality. But, on the other hand, humans need a sense of purpose and the world seems to hold together through the purposes of entities, including humans. Whether our purposes are real or illusory depends on who is asking the question and why. And in the struggle to achieve material fairness for people, it doesn't really matter whether justice is inherent or not. Either way, justice is what we need to be working toward. The fact that purpose is not inherent does not mean the universe is meaningless.

Episode 4: A conversation with Christian Miller: Is character in decline in America?

Christian Miller's work has been concerned for years with human moral character and specifically how we can improve our characters and why it is important for us to try to do so. He sees Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as also concerned with character and the way in which the character of Americans can be improved to be more in keeping with the ideals and promise of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The elements of character Dr. King particularly emphasized were faith, hope, compassion and courage.

The question for Christian Miller is whether and how these religiously infused characteristics can be transmuted in such a way that they are available to secular society. Without God, it is not necessarily the case that justice will triumph. We even see some evidence that character is in decline in America. But even if there is a God, there is a danger from a misunderstanding of Dr. King's teaching—that we human beings can sit back and wait for the triumph of justice rather than actively pursuing it. Another problem is the moral relativism in the culture, which Miller rejects. Justice and character must be worked at and that will be difficult if we believe that all morality is equal.

Episode 5: A conversation with Tracey McCants Lewis: Will the moral universe bend toward justice?

Tracey McCants Lewis has made numerous contributions to Pittsburgh and the region. She has been a tenured professor of law at Duquesne University School of Law, she is Deputy General Counsel to the Pittsburgh Penguins and serves on the Board of Directors of the August Wilson African-American Cultural Center. McCants Lewis is a leader in the movement for social justice, in recognition of which the Urban League awarded her the Ron Brown Community Leadership Award in 2017. Part of that leadership is her current work at Duquesne Law School's Civil Rights Clinic where, among other things, students provide advice and represent individuals pursuing expungements and pardons.

For Tracey McCants Lewis, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is not just a hero out of history, but a constant and contemporary source of inspiration. When Dr. King taught about the arc of the moral universe, it gave people at that time a sense of optimism and hope. Many of the things Dr. King looked for have come true, though much remains to be done. Some of those good things have even happened in hockey. In his plays, August Wilson exemplifies the seeking of justice that Dr. King was pointing to.