

# Psychologist Explains How Liberals and Conservatives Can Have Better Conversations in New Book

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*Psychologist Kenneth Barish explains how we can engage in constructive dialogue and find common ground*

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, October 31, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As Thanksgiving approaches this year, many Americans will find themselves sitting around a dinner table with people whose political beliefs are very different from their own.

As the rhetoric between liberals and conservatives has grown increasingly hateful and accusatory, many families are unable to engage in any kind of political conversation at all.

New book *Bridging Our Political Divide: How Liberals and Conservatives Can Understand Each Other and Find Common Ground*, by Kenneth Barish, collects the insights of a psychologist who offers antidotes to the unproductive arguments that now dominate our political culture.

The Clinical Professor of Psychology teaches us how to listen, think, and speak about our political opinions in a way that allows us to understand each other's concerns, resist false dichotomies and ideological certainty, see new perspectives and possibilities, and find common ground.

He explains: "We are more likely to be open-minded when new facts are presented in the context of dialogue; when we feel that our needs and feelings have been acknowledged; if we feel respected; and when we are less afraid... For coming closer together, we need to cultivate this openness, to the extent possible."

The existence of these oppositional political beliefs is far from new. Barish, who is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, offers a brief history as a way of understanding our current political divide.

In Roman politics, the Optimates ("best men") believed in preserving tradition while the Populares ("favoring the people") proposed welfare programs and the expansion of citizenship rights.

Although presented in changed forms, these early conflicts form the basis of liberalism and conservatism today. Conservative political ideas can be understood as maintaining the existing

social order and reacting to perceived threats. Meanwhile, liberalism is described as a belief in humane social reform and questioning established authority.

He explains: "The greater the perceived threat or excess, the more impassioned the conservative reaction; in a similar way, the greater the perceived cruelty or injustice, the more impassioned the liberal desire for change."

One of Bridging Our Political Divide's key arguments is that these political attitudes are not limited to politics. Liberal and conservative sensibilities permeate all aspects of life, from science to art, from how children are raised to how an institution is run.

Barish carefully notes that, while there are essential truths to both liberalism and conservatism, they can be expressed in moderate or extreme forms.

He explains that extreme forms of conservatism, for example, are often authoritarian, intolerant, xenophobic and fundamentalist, or disguised justifications for protecting hierarchy and privilege.

In contrast, he suggests extreme liberalism "denies the legitimacy of current institutions and regards them as evil. The greater the felt illegitimacy of institutions, the greater the extremism. In its radical forms, liberalism believes that institutions are always wrong and aggrieved individuals are always right."

Barish identifies the emotions that sit below our political opinions – resentment, humiliation, pride and fear. Bridging Our Political Divide builds towards centering those emotions in our dialogue.

Barish notes: "One of the major themes of this book is that we are motivated in our political opinions first by feelings and secondarily by ideas or beliefs. Our political opinions begin with what feels right or wrong to us."

According to the scholar, we can only begin to understand why we disagree – and how we can talk to one another more constructively – once we understand why our opponents feel the way they do. Although listening is difficult when strong feelings and opinions are involved, Barish shows us how dialogue is possible, even when we strongly disagree.

"We should express our "opinions" less often and, instead, express our "concerns." We need to consider someone else's opinion with greater charity and regard our own with less certainty and more humility," he explains.

"We need to acknowledge the limits of our political attitudes and ideology and work toward greater pragmatism. We need to think less often of "either/or" and "for/against," and more often of "how" and "and/also."

Bridging Our Political Divide is an essential contribution to a better national conversation. Barish offers a host of workable proposals, including building collaborative problem-solving discussions, identifying an opponent's most reasonable arguments, understanding the limits of one's own political philosophy and making small changes in response to another's concerns.

Barish encourages readers, armed with his insights and potential solutions, to identify the ways that they can stretch across partisan divisions with a view toward building a better society for America's future generations.

Further information:

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