

4. Give them time to engage with the material.

Starting Personally:

1. So what stood out to you? How come?

The Big Picture Conversations: The conversations I'm hoping to have are:

1. *The Internal Human Nature Question*: Do you think that there is a deeper evil within us? Within human nature? Of course, we know that bad families or bad laws or bad circumstances contribute to evil in the world. But fundamentally, I don't think we can just blame external factors all the time. I think the problem is internal to us. I think human nature itself is corrupted.
 - a. Be prepared to illustrate this personally. Tell your story if it seems appropriate.
 - i. 'Don't we feel a need to be absolved and cleansed?' From the movie *Sicko* by Michael Moore: There's a man who used to disqualify people from medical coverage intentionally to save the company money, and then he quit the industry, said that that didn't 'atone' for his participation in the system, but he's glad to be out of it. What does it mean to have an 'atonement' for the evil in us?
 - ii. Jesus fundamentally changes our identity, and helps us engage with an inner civil war against our own evil and self-centeredness. So it's not that we suddenly become perfect people. And Jesus always has us return to the areas of life in which we failed, and he retells our story, to redeem it.
 - b. Many people will say that human beings are only good, and that evil is external to us. It's rooted in the bad families, laws, or circumstances.
 - i. So then are we individually responsible for our actions? Or did our environment make us do it? I totally believe that if we work on families, laws, and circumstances, it would be important. But I think we also have an internal problem, a leaning towards self-centeredness. It's not just external forces.
 - ii. So what do you think about Bernie Madoff? The guy who pretended to run a multi-billion dollar investment fund, but only ripped people off? He was pretty educated. What do you think about educated people who do evil?
 - iii. Education is not enough.
 1. What do the quotes [poverty could be solved with 1% of global income; we cannot depend on the morality of good people] make you think?
 2. So what about the campus itself? If the college campus is supposed to be so effective at moral education, then why do 10% to 25% of women in college get raped? In fact, 90% of the victims know the men who rape them?^[1] Alcohol or drugs are frequently used to intoxicate women, especially in fraternity houses, to make them more susceptible to sexual coercion. Sadly, up to 40% of rape victims develop sexually transmitted diseases.^[2] Looking beyond the U.S., we find that 'rape is common worldwide, with relatively similar rates of incidence across countries, with 19%-28% of college women reporting rape or attempted rape in several countries.'^[3] That's not counting attempted rape, attempted coercion, verbal pestering, being stalked, and unwanted sexual contact more generally. The fact that Tufts University in 2009 had to make a residential life policy that you couldn't have sex in your room while your roommate was there, nor could you 'sexile' your roommate (exiling him or her so that you could have sex),^[4] means that even respect and conflict resolution skills have been deteriorating on campuses. This is happening at the campus, the very institution that is supposed to be shaping people's moral lives for the better, the very place that notions of good and evil, right and wrong should be taking root in people's hearts and minds.

3. Furthermore, the campus is effective at producing careerists, but not at producing people who use their professions and lives for higher goals. For example, despite what pre-law students say about wanting to do pro-bono work or civil rights law, most go into corporate law. This is strongly suggested by Katchadourian and Boli, *Cream of the Crop: The Impact of Elite Education in the Decade After College*, in 1994, and by Page Smith, *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America*, 1990. Since college educations cost so much, and graduate school even more, and since people want to maximize their investment in themselves, the emotions that reign on campus are anxiety, fear, greed, and self-centeredness. Naturally, most students will work hard and then choose money-making ventures. Where is the university's moral case for calling students to live for more than themselves? How successful has their rhetoric been? Not very, and increasingly weaker. In an age of moral relativism, the university puts forward a weak moral case, if any at all.
 4. Secular American culture has promoted 'reason' to shape behavior and curb human evil. But has it worked? "As an alternative to tradition, the United States has proposed reason. Educate citizens and inform them, and they can be counted on to behave sensibly – this is the Jeffersonian-Enlightenment faith on which the United States was founded. It has not been fulfilled. Until recently the world's leader in education, the United States leads likewise in crime, delinquency, and divorce."¹⁵
 5. This gets to the heart of the problem. Education has, at times, become a handmaiden to evil and injustice. Because of the Enlightenment, Europeans thought they were smarter than everyone else in the world; that led to European imperialism. Smart people can help with some things. But are they 'the answer'?
- iv. I'm not saying that we are totally and only evil. But I am saying that I think the line between good and evil cuts right down the center of who we are.
 - v. Don't you think we tend to shift the blame from ourselves? A lot of studies report that we (this generation of young people) have high self-esteem and mediocre competence. We have been affirmed, affirmed, and affirmed, until we actually try to do something challenging. Then we fail, or are mediocre, but expect to be affirmed. Do you think that's influencing our view of ourselves nowadays?
- c. Other sources outside the Bible that point out human evil:
- i. Pop culture: Woody Allen ran off with his wife's adopted daughter. Even the liberal New York Times reporter asked him, 'Come on – this is a little far. Even if she's not your biological daughter, she's still your wife's adopted daughter, and your daughter.' His response was, 'The heart wants what it wants.'
 - ii. Literature: 'Because it seemed clear that wars were not made by generations and their special stupidities, but wars were made instead by something ignorant in the human heart' (John Knowles, *A Separate Peace*, p.193 paperback edition).
 - iii. Literature: "'There isn't anyone to help you. Only me. And I'm the Beast...Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!' said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. 'You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go. Why things are what they are?'" (William Golding, *The Lord of the Flies*, p.130 – 131)
 - iv. Economics: Blamed by some for not doing more to prevent the crisis, Mr. Greenspan denied any responsibility for the problems gripping the global economy. 'It's *human nature*, unless somebody can find a way to change human nature, we will have more crises and none of them will look like this because no two crises have anything in common, except *human nature*.' (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8244600.stm>, *Market crisis 'will happen again'*, September 2009)

- v. Psychology: ‘We need more understanding of human nature, because the only real danger that exists is man himself... We know nothing of man, far too little. His psyche should be studied because we are the origin of all coming evil.’ (Carl Jung, BBC interview, 1959)
 - vi. Psychology: Reviews of Cordelia Fine’s book *A Mind of Its Own: How Your Brain Distorts and Deceives*, From Publishers Weekly. ‘Vain, immoral, bigoted: this is your brain in action, according to Fine, a research associate at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at Australian National University. Fine documents a wealth of surprising information about the brain in this readable account that adopts a good-humored tone about the brain’s failings without underestimating the damage they do. The brain, she shows, distorts reality in order to save us from the ego-destroying effects of failure and pessimism. For example, an optimist who fails at something edits the truth by blaming others for the failure and then takes complete credit for any successes. The brain also routinely disapproves of other people’s behavior (how could he do that?), while at the same time interpreting one’s own actions in the best possible light (I would never do that!). The brain also projects stereotypes onto others that reflect prejudicial beliefs rather than objective reality. Despite the firm hold these distortions have on our brains, Fine is not a pessimist. The path to overcoming stereotypes and other distortions of the brain, she says, may be gained through self-awareness and knowledge provided by experimental psychology, a field that explores and exposes unconscious mental influences. (July)’
 - vii. Pop culture: Hannibal Lecter, *Silence of the Lambs*. In response to the question, ‘What happened to you?’ Hannibal Lecter says, ‘Nothing has happened to me, officer Starling. I happened. You can’t reduce me to a set of influences. You’ve given up good and evil for behavioralism, officer Starling. You’ve got everybody in dignity pants. Nothing is ever anybody’s fault. Look at me, officer Starling. Can you stand to say, ‘I’m evil?’
- d. *Right panels*: From the slides on ‘Can God Change Humanity,’ or ‘How Might God Change Humanity,’ you can get to the Christian story: The importance of Jesus is that in the Christian story, we have a God who is attacking the corruption in human nature at its source: within us. God, by coming in the person of Jesus, acquires a human body; he acquires our disease and fights it every step of the way; he never sins; he purifies his human nature and kills it when he dies at the cross; he comes back in his resurrection as a new kind of human being – a cleansed, healed, and transformed human being that is purified by the love of God. And he is able to make a spiritual connection with any of us who ask him so we can share in his new humanity. That’s how he gives us a ‘new heart’ that the quotes from Jeremiah and Ezekiel talk about.
- i. If it makes sense, ask: ‘Have you ever considered allowing Jesus to transform you?’ ‘Are there any things that hold you back from allowing him to?’
 - ii. Offer to pray with them.
 - iii. Either to begin a relationship with Jesus, if appropriate, or that God would bring transformation. Invite them to related event or to participate in a related GIG (lunch discussion, etc.) or Global Poverty Impact or something the fellowship is doing to serve and engage the campus.
2. *The Question of Hope in a Comparative Religion Framework*:
- a. *Atheism*:
 - i. Is there really good and evil in an objective sense? Or is it just in our heads? Our opinions? In Harry Potter book 1, Professor Quirrell, the minor villain, says, ‘There is no good and evil, only power, and those too weak to seek it.’ (J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, p.291) Do you agree with this?
 - 1. If they say good and evil are relativistic concepts, then ask, ‘What makes each human being valuable?’

Marxism as the organs of bourgeois reaction, used for the protection of the exploitation and the stupefaction of the working class.’ (Lenin, Vladimir. About the attitude of the working party toward the religion. Collected works, v. 17, p.41) That is why Stalin purged Russian Orthodox Christians, why Mao killed Chinese Christians, why the Vietnamese Catholics were persecuted, etc.

3. If the person talks about the mistakes made by the church, it’s important to say, ‘*Sure, but if the mistakes of Christians are significant to you, how are the mistakes of atheists significant to you? In fact, within Christianity, there is a way to judge Christians against the teachings of Jesus. Is there something against which atheists can be held accountable?*’
 - Consider ‘Social Darwinism’ (a term that appeared in 1877 by sociologists opposed to the concept): Darwin himself said, ‘Thus the weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man. It is surprising how soon a want of care, or care wrongly directed, leads to the degeneration of a domestic race; but excepting in the case of man himself, hardly any one is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed. The aid which we feel impelled to give to the helpless is mainly an incidental result of the instinct of sympathy, which was originally acquired as part of the social instincts, but subsequently rendered, in the manner previously indicated, more tender and more widely diffused. Nor could we check our sympathy, even at the urging of hard reason, without deterioration in the noblest part of our nature. The surgeon may harden himself whilst performing an operation, for he knows that he is acting for the good of his patient; but if we were intentionally to neglect the weak and helpless, it could only be for a contingent benefit, with an overwhelming present evil. ... We must therefore bear the undoubtedly bad effects of the weak surviving and propagating their kind; but there appears to be at least one check in steady action, namely that the weaker and inferior members of society do not marry so freely as the sound; and this check might be indefinitely increased by the weak in body or mind refraining from marriage, though this is more to be hoped for than expected.’ (*The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 1882, p.134) Darwin’s cousin, Francis Galton, in 1865 and 1869, ‘argued that just as physical traits were clearly inherited among generations of people, so could be said for mental qualities (genius and talent). Galton argued that social morals needed to change so that heredity was a conscious decision, in order to avoid over-breeding by less fit members of society and the under-breeding of the more fit ones. In Galton's view, social institutions such as welfare and insane asylums were allowing inferior humans to survive and reproduce at levels faster than the more "superior" humans in respectable society, and if corrections were not soon taken, society would be awash with ‘inferiors.’’ (‘Social Darwinism,’ Wikipedia).
 - Consider the Eugenics Movement, which was started by Francis Galton. Eugenics was the idea that hereditary traits could and should be intentionally bred through selective human mating. Galton said, ‘I propose to show in this book that a man’s natural abilities are derived by inheritance, under exactly the same limitations as are the form and physical features of the whole organic world. Consequently, as it is easy, notwithstanding those limitations, to obtain by careful selection a permanent breed of dogs or horses gifted with peculiar powers of running, or of doing anything else, so it would be quite practicable to produce a highly-gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations.’ (*Hereditary Genius*, p.1) During the first few decades of the 20th century, eugenics was practiced around the world, and promoted by governments, through: genetic screening, birth control, promoting differential birth rates, marriage restrictions, segregation (both racial segregation as well as segregation of

the mentally ill from the rest of the population), compulsory sterilization, forced abortions or forced pregnancies and genocide. British Christian journalist G. K. Chesterton was an early critic of the philosophy of eugenics, expressing this opinion in his book, *Eugenics and Other Evils* (1917). Nevertheless, eugenics became an academic discipline at many colleges and universities, and received funding from many sources. This movement was hugely popular in the early 20th century and quickly died out after World War II after the realization that Adolf Hitler had been a major proponent of it. Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan developed ideas of racial hygiene, human experimentation, and the extermination of ‘unwanted’ people groups.

b. *Hinduism, Buddhism:*

i. *Right panel:* ‘In a linear story like the stories that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam tell, you have a good God who cannot co-exist eternally with an evil world. So God has to bring about a resolution to that evil. But in the circular stories like in Buddhism and Hinduism and atheism, you don’t have a resolution. The god in Hinduism is both good and evil. So even though we say ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ those things are just our opinion. In objective reality, there is no real difference between good and evil; it’s just the same thing. So to be enlightened, you have to accept that and accept the world as it is.’

1. That leads to a passive, ‘accept the world as it is’ type of spirituality. Look at how hard it’s been for Hinduism and Buddhism to really engage social injustice. The Hindu caste system is brutal. And while there have been Buddhist monks in Myanmar (Burma) who are resisting the military, this seems to be the exception. If you don’t think you can do much about good and evil, then you tend to withdraw. This is very different from the ‘engage the world’ type of spirituality of Christianity. Do you want to be part of a happy ending?

2. Where does your motivation to do good and be good come from then?

c. If you believe in a god who is not doing anything about human evil, you should be angry at that god. Or completely apathetic – how does he hold your attention?

i. This is important to say to the person who says, ‘I believe in god, but I don’t believe Jesus was god.’ If you disconnect Jesus from God, you get a Jesus who is a nice guy but kind of crazy, and a god who is not doing anything about human evil at its very source – in human nature. So that god winds up being complicit in human evil.

ii. The God who is in Jesus is giving all of Himself, personally, to love humanity and crush human evil in our nature. And He does this by preserving our free choice because that’s an aspect of His love for us.

iii. For more information on how the Christian God is purely good, not a combination of good and evil, see Mako’s *Evil and the Christian God*, found here: <http://nagasawafamily.org/article%20evil%20and%20the%20christian%20god.pdf>. For even more info, see: http://nagasawafamily.org/archives_question_char_of_god.htm.

3. *The Historical Question:* What good has Christianity done anyway?

a. Twentieth century non-violent resistance movements against imperialism and racism, including the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.

i. As a resource, read Mako’s *The Role of Jesus in Revolution and the Pursuit of Justice*, found here: http://nagasawafamily.org/archives_question_evil.htm

b. Freedom of religion, i.e. political pluralism and the First Amendment

i. ‘Secularism in the modern political meaning – the idea that religion and political authority, church and state are different, and can or should be separated – is, in a profound sense, Christian. Its origins may be traced in the teachings of Christ [e.g. the famous passage ‘Render unto Caesar the things of Caesar, and unto God the things that are God’s’ in Matthew 22:21], confirmed by the experience of

the first Christians; its later development was shaped and, in a sense, imposed by the subsequent history of Christendom. The persecutions endured by the early church made it clear that a separation between the two was possible; the persecutions inflicted by later churches persuaded many Christians that such a separation was necessary.' (Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*, p.96)

- c. The concept of human rights.
 - i. 'From the late tenth through the mid-eleventh centuries, various church synods in France had instituted the convention called the "Peace of God," which used the threat of excommunication to prevent private wars and attacks upon women, peasants, merchants, clergy, and other noncombatants, and which required every house, high and low, to pledge itself to preserving the peace. Other synods, over the course of the eleventh century, instituted the "Truce of God," which forbade armed aggression on so many days of the year – penitential periods, feasts, fasts, harvests, from Wednesday evening to Monday morning, and so on – that ultimately more than three-quarters of the calendar consisted in periods of mandatory tranquility; in the twelfth century, the Truce's prohibitions became fixed in civil law. The reason such conventions could actually serve (even partially) to limit aggression is that they proceed from a spiritual authority that no baptized person, however powerful or rapacious, could entirely ignore. And, while we might be disposed to think such things as the late medieval code of chivalry, or the church's teachings on just causes for and just conduct in war, or the church's bans upon the use of certain sorts of military machinery rather quaint and ineffectual, they did actually exercise – in the days when men and women still had souls to consider – a moral authority greater than the ambition of any lord, monarch, or state. With the advent of modernity, however, and the collapse of Christian unity in the West, the last traces of that authority were effectively swept away. To compensate for the loss, devout Christian scholars of law, such as Francisco de Vitoria (c.1483 – 1546) , the Dominican champion of the cause of the New World Indians, and the Dutch Reformed jurist Hugo Grotius (1583 – 1645), laid the foundations for conventions of international law regarding "human rights" and justifiable warfare, derived from Christian traditions concerning natural law. But, of course, it was the sovereign state alone that determined to what extent those conventions would be adopted; they were grounded, after all, in theological tradition, and the "irrational" dictates of faith could no longer command assent. The special – indeed, unique – contribution of the newly emancipated secular order to the political constitution of Western society was of another kind altogether; it can be reduced to two thoroughly modern, thoroughly post-Christian, thoroughly "enlightened" principles: the absolute state – and total war.' (David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, p.97 – 98)
 - ii. 'Secular humanism [the dignity and value of each human being] is a Christian heresy. It is a hollowed out version of Christianity.' (John Gray, Professor of European Thought at London School of Economics)
- d. Transforming Western cities to be much more humane:
 - i. 'Public hospitals were one of the definite Christian contributions to the city. Jerome relates that in AD 360 Fabiola gave up his villa for the care of the needy sick, otherwise left to die wretchedly in the streets of Rome. From that time on, very rapidly after the eleventh century, the holy orders founded hospitals in almost every town: there would be at least two in most German towns, one for lepers, and one for other types of disease...And note: there are the rule, rather than the exceptions. (Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1961, p.295 – 6) What was involved in a realization of the Christian city? Nothing less, I submit, than a thoroughgoing rejection of the original basis on which the city had been founded: the renunciation of the long-maintained monopoly of power and knowledge; the reorganization of laws and property rights in the interest of justice, free from coercion, the abolition of slavery and of compulsory labor for the benefit of a ruling minority, and the elimination of gross economic inequalities between class and class. On those terms, the citizens might find on earth at least a measure of that charity and

justice that were promised to them, on their repentance, in heaven. In the Christian city, one would suppose, citizens would have the opportunity to live together in brotherhood and mutual assistance, without quailing before arbitrary power, or constantly anticipating external violence and sudden death. The rejection of the old order imposed originally by the citadel was the minimal basis of Christian peace and order. (Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1961, p.317)

- e. Abolition of forced labor slavery in England, France, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia in the Middle Ages.
 - i. 'Slavery ended in [these places in] medieval Europe only because the church extended its sacraments to all slaves and then managed to impose a ban on the enslavement of Christians (and of Jews). Within the context of medieval Europe, that prohibition was effectively a rule of universal abolition.' (Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: Why Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*, p.28)
 - ii. Although Christians were complicit in the Atlantic slave trade, they corrected course and abolished slavery again, and also abolished the slave trade and slavery in many other countries by (largely British) intervention.
- f. Economic and scientific development
 - i. 'The so-called Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth century has been misinterpreted by those wishing to assert an inherent conflict between religion and science. Some wonderful things were achieved in this era, but they were not produced by an eruption of secular thinking. Rather, these achievements were the culmination of many centuries of systematic progress by medieval Scholastics, sustained by that uniquely Christian twelfth-century invention, the university. Not only were science and religion compatible, they were inseparable – the rise of science was achieved by deeply religious Christian scholars.' (Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: Why Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*, p.12) Real science arose only once: in Europe. China, Islam, India, and ancient Greece and Rome each had a highly developed alchemy. But only in Europe did alchemy develop into chemistry. By the same token, many societies developed elaborate systems of astrology, but only in Europe did astrology lead to astronomy. Why? Again, the answer has to do with images of God.' (p.14)
 - ii. By contrast: 'It would seem that Islam has a conception of God appropriate to underwrite the rise of science. Not so. Allah is not presented as a lawful creator but is conceived as an extremely active God who intrudes on the world as he deems appropriate. This prompted the formation of a major theological bloc within Islam that condemns all efforts to formulate natural laws as blasphemy in that they deny Allah's freedom to act. Thus, Islam did not fully embrace the notion that the universe ran along on fundamental principles laid down by God at the creation but assumed that the world was sustained by his will on a continuing basis...Whenever the subject of Islamic science and learning is raised, most historians emphasize that throughout the centuries when Christian Europe knew virtually nothing of Greek learning, it was alive and deeply appreciated in Islam. That is certainly true, as is the fact that some classical manuscripts reached Christian Europe through contact with Islam. But the possession of all this enlightenment did not prompt much intellectual progress within Islam, let alone eventuate in Islamic science. Instead, Muslim intellectuals regarded Greek learning, especially the work of Aristotle, as virtual scripture to be *believed* rather than pursued.' (p.21)
- g. Led to environmentalism, through Rachel Carson, a Presbyterian:
 - i. 'Rachel Carson—biologist, writer, conservationist, Presbyterian, and founder of the modern U.S. environmental movement—never lost her sense of wonder and awe in the natural world. She instinctively rooted for life and was ferocious in its defense. She sought out suppressed narratives in nature, such as the silencing of songbirds by industrial pesticides described in her 1962 classic *Silent Spring*. She cultivated an affectionate ethic for the natural world and the humans who worked most closely with it. Carson was driven by some "memory of paradise," as playwright Eugene Ionesco put it. Carson understood that human dignity was protected by social justice and

had its own kind of natural beauty. Though *Silent Spring* focused on songbirds, Carson also flagged the danger pesticides posed to farm workers. Her research, along with immigration policy changes, gave Chicano leaders Dolores Huerta and César Chávez the climate they needed to mobilize for the rights and safety of farm workers, leading to the formation of the United Farm Workers union.' (Rose Marie Berger, an associate editor of *Sojourners*, is a Catholic peace activist and poet)