EPISODE 72

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06] ANNOUNCER: You are listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, leadership conversations that explore adapting and thriving in a complex world with Rick Torseth and guests.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:20] RT: Hi, everybody. This is Rick Torseth, and this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders. This is the podcast where we have conversations with individuals who've made a decision to lead in the world and take on some really difficult challenges. Today, it's a pleasure to have Aidan McQuade join us in the swamping, as we call this the swamp. Aidan brings all the qualifications for being in this conversation. He was the director of the Anti-Slavery International Organization on Human Rights from 2006 to 2017. That's a long tour of duty.

During that time, you were the first person to raise the imperative of making slavery eradication a post-2015 global development goal, and you were alone in that until this guy in Rome named Pope Francis decided to join the conversation. You have a doctorate in moral philosophy and social science. And we're going to get to this one, you won the Mastermind Competition in 2013. You are a novelist of two books and you have also written a book called *Ethical Leadership: Moral Decision-Making Under Pressure*. That's the tie that binds our conversation here today. That's how we met. First of all, thank you very much for coming to the podcast and having the conversation with me.

[0:01:31] AM: Thanks so much for having me, Rick. It's a real pleasure.

[0:01:33] RT: It's good. All right. Before we get into the details of what you've done, what do you want people to know about you that you think will help establish some context for our conversation?

[0:01:44] AM: I supposed that, well, I've led some difficult circumstances before. Even I was director of Anti-Slavery International, I led Oxfam's response to the humanitarian emergency as

a result of the war in Angola. And that's where a lot of my thinking about the difficulties of leadership and the challenges, the moral challenges which fierce leaders began to arise. Because you were seeing in that situation, seeing lots of people who were just coming to Angola to make a buck whenever you could see considerable hardship as a result of war all around them. And the way in which they were making that buck was from diamond trade, oil trading, which were the things that were keeping the war going. That led me to wonder why essentially do good people do bad things, which is something which particularly the American social psychologist of the 1960s did some important, extremely important research on, which I'm sure many of your listeners are familiar with. But then it led me also to think of which perhaps my little contribution, which is why do good people do good things whenever the social pressures are to the contrary. And that then led me into studying a doctorate after I left Angola.

[0:03:01] RT: There's a piece of background here that I am making a story and an assumption also influences your work. And that is that you grew up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. And so if it's okay, could we go back to maybe somewhere back then? And my question is how did that experience growing up there perhaps influence so much directional and the choices you made about how you would use yourself?

[0:03:24] AM: That's a good question. It's possibly something which I haven't completely ever processed. A number of things. I mean, my father, the part of my community I came from was very opposed to violence. It was a very strong influence of Martin Luther King's teachings on large portions of the nationalist community of the north of Ireland, the ones who run the receiving end of the British state's repression, which was drawn very deeply on Martin Luther King's philosophy of nonviolence. And that's the part of the community that I came from.

One of the questions that always left to me as a result of that was how can you give practical expression to that ideal of nonviolence? The second thing I suppose that it left me with, which was complete de-romanticized view of war. And now there is increasingly a more romantic hue bestowed upon that period by people who never knew it. And there tends to be a romantic view of war imposed by people who have never experienced it. I mean, they've seen the Great Escape and the Dambusters, maybe, and that's what they think war is like.

And the ghastliness of it, the ghastly intimacy of it, is something which they have difficulty in contemplating. And so I think that led me to more natural sympathy with people who are on the receiving end of war and a continuing urge to try and do something about that. That led me initially into working in development, humanitarian response.

I had probably in my youth some idea that I'd come back to the north of Ireland and try and make a contribution here. But the way life panned out, that never happened. But I hope I've made useful contributions towards this practical expression of nonviolence in other parts of the world in which I've worked, whether that's Angola, or the UK, or Ethiopia, all places in which I work. That remains a recurrent theme in my life, I suppose.

As I look back on my youth, I might think of myself actually, I was something of a man of action then and I think I'm something of a man of – I hope, I'm something of a man of thought. And still in terms of thinking and writing, I'm trying to make those practical contributions to nonviolence and to reducing the impulse towards coercive and vengeful responses to situations of injustice towards something which are more constructive, more meaningful, some things which will maybe remove the impetus for violence for future generations.

[0:06:07] RT: So it's a big mission. Help listeners. Let's make that connection a little bit here to the work that you've done and the book that you've written around ethical leadership. What were sort of the DNA while you're doing this work where you started to formulate your own point of view about ethical leadership? What were the causes of it and what were the inputs that you drew from to sort of formulate your point of view?

[0:06:29] AM: Well, I mean, as your listeners will know, as you'd be well aware, I mean, there's such a diverse range of perspectives on the issue of leadership, all of them equally valid, all of them equally essential to try and contemplate if one wishes to be a decent leader. The one that I focused in on was that of decision-making because in my own role as a chief executive and as a country director for humanitarian [inaudible 0:06:53] problematic ones, the most absorbing ones. Because as anybody who has led in an organization will know a lot of leadership is about allocation of resources and allocation more to the point of insufficient resources between multiple competing, equally admirable, equally deserving priorities. So how do you make those changes?

And that's something which is a very vexing question in the decision-making and then leads to upset and resentment afterwards. Again, something which you have to manage as a leader. So that was the area then that I focused in on, because within Angola, whenever I was working there, I was working on a humanitarian operation, which was providing water sanitation and health education to about a quarter of a million people in a country in which you could have doubled, trebled and probably quadrupled the size of that operation and still not have had enough resources to deal with all the people who were in need as a result of the war.

So you know that some of the choices that you're making are going to have the cost of human life associated with them. That thought problem with the tram where you can flick the switch and it kills one person or flick it and not to flick the switch and it kills three people becomes a very real leadership choice in a lot of humanitarian operations. In one instance, which I read about in ethical leadership, I had to shut down, I felt I had to shut down a humanitarian operation because the risk to my staff was too high. That was literally saying I value the possibility of risk to my staff more highly than the probability of ill health to the people who they were trying to serve. And that may well have cost human life particularly of children as a result of that. But I still think that was the right choice. But I promise you, I didn't sleep well for the next 10 years as a result of that.

One of the things that I was thinking about is I think almost all leaders have to make momentous choices in their careers. But aside from the medical profession, perhaps, very few are well prepared with the thoughts and thinking tools to make those choices. So whenever it comes to you, when that moment of truth arises, you're ill-prepared for it. I felt that was something which would be useful to try and make a contribution to the world of leadership about actually trying to help people understand better both what those sorts of choices might be and how they might handle them whenever they come along. And that goes back to the battlefields of Angola.

[0:09:51] RT: Okay, so let's go there because I think you've done a really nice job of trying to provide people with resources for that. But let's begin with what you have as your own definition of an ethical leader. You're pretty specific and you're pretty articulating your definition in the book. So just for people's framing, what does that mean to you?

[0:10:12] AM: It's about somebody who tries to prioritize what I call life-affirming choices within the mix of the choices that are presented to people. If you have to do something, try and do the most life-affirming thing. And to get a little bit more practical about that, I steal Kate Raworth's notion of Doughnut Economics for that. And Kate Raworth's notion of Doughnut Economics is you should make essentially all strategic choices between a foundation of respect for human rights and a ceiling of respect for ecological protection.

You should never do something which is going to, for example, break people's rights to free expression and freedom of association on one hand, and you should never do something which destroys key aspects of the environment as well. You need to negotiate between those two. And that's sort of the framework that I suggest one should make leadership's decisions within with the idea of always trying to make the most life-affirming choice, even in relatively banal choices, which don't come close to that, but do the things which are going to enhance people's joie de vie, enhance people's happiness in so far as is possible. Or minimize their disruption if that's going to be the actual reality of the outcome. That's what I mean an ethical leader does.

[0:11:43] RT: Okay. And you've gone further and you provided them – I'm going to call it a model. But I mean you did a shot to define what you are using the cruciform of agency. This is a big deal in the book from my reading of it. It sort of underpins a lot of the things that follow in the book. Would you take as much time as you want to explain not just what it is but how you came to this as a facilitating process for people to make these kinds of decisions you just described?

[0:12:12] AM: Yeah, whenever you start reading about the agency in the literature, there's two, I think, seminal pieces of work. One's Emirbayer and Mische's paper from 1996, '97, I think, which is called *What Is Agency?* And it focuses very much on the social aspects of choice-making and it posits that there are things that come from the past into the present and the future. But it's very much about the social aspects of choice-making and the pressures which lead to that.

And if one's in an organization, there's certain social processes which try and shape the way or constrain the way in which one makes choices. If, for example, your humanitarian operation, your choices are going to be made in relation to humanitarian operations and the impacts which they have on people external to your organization. And that's the social aspect.

Then the other I think seminal writer in this is Margaret Archer. She focuses very much on the personal aspects of choice and particularly the role of conscience in choice-making. What I did was actually think about bringing these two things together because they've been very often considered an opposition to each other. And whenever you brought these two together, you could see almost that the personal intersects orthogonally with the social. And this, if one draws a picture of it, makes a shape which is crucifix-shaped. Hence, the cruciform of the agency, which also has another happy perhaps connotation in that making of choices is often a crucifying experience.

But it's about understanding that whatever choice you make, it's not just the social factors which influence what you're making, but also the personal factors. Your own conscience should play an active part in this choice-making. And in those circumstances where you negate your conscience and your values and your experience in making those choices and say, "It's just something which the circumstances require of me," then you're into a situation in which you are going to lead unethically and very often immorally because you're not bringing that personal responsibility into the situation. You're negating a fundamental role of leadership, which is that taking of responsibility for how one's trying to shape the social. And so that becomes very important.

And if you look at some of the most dreadful atrocities of history, whether one's looking at the Nazis in the Second World War or the My Lai massacre in the Vietnam War, one of the recurring themes in defense of those who committed atrocities was I was just following orders, where they were literally saying it was nothing to do with me, or my thoughts, or my values. I was just doing what the social situation told me to do.

One can play that on through to the present time, where if you are a leader in – another example is a paper by Craig and Greenbaum where they were writing about ethical choices within a mining operation in South Africa. One of the things they observed was that the main management was saying things like, "Well, we understand your concerns that you're raising around things like health and safety, but the organization requires us to do this. We just have to get the job done here. This isn't anything to do with us really."

And Craig and Greenbaum make the comment in relation to this, which is that, "But they actually were the organization. They were the ones who were setting these rules to be followed, which they then said they couldn't break and which was leading to negative consequences on the environment and on their workforce as a result of that." It was that denial of personal responsibility for the social outcomes is what was really problematic with that example and it's really problematic with all examples whenever one negates the personal responsibility for the making of choices. Because one might like to tell one's self that, "This is nothing to do with me. I just have to go along with what's going on." But it is always something to do with you because the very least you can do in those situations is to raise protest.

And one of the other things I say in the book is that protest is itself leadership because it's a way in which societies, communities, even families can begin to change the ways they think about themselves and open up new dialogues and conversations about how things are happening, how things have been allowed to continue happening. And we see that most of the great changes of the 20th century from Civil Rights in the United States and in the north of Ireland, to the ending of apartheid in South Africa, to hopefully justice for the Palestinian people as a result of protest and the challenging of the vested interests who are quite happy to allow injustice to persist because they're benefiting from it.

There's a line which the Irish patriot Roger Casement wrote at one stage which in relation to a challenge he made to an atrocity in Africa in the 1890s. He said, "We all on earth have a commission and a right to defend the weak against the strong and to protest against injustice and brutality in every shape and form. And I think if you believe in nonviolence, you have to try and adhere to that. Because if you believe in nonviolence, the only thing you really have is your words and your arguments. And ultimately, it's those which change the ways in which others think about the world and can begin to reduce the intolerance for violence or reduce the tolerance for violence rather and for prejudice which exists elsewhere. But none of that is ever possible if one denies personal responsibility for your role, some measure of personal responsibility for your role in this social world.

And hence, this is the idea of the cruciform of agency again. We must always see that we are something who can bring to bear our own conscience, our own experience, our own morality

upon social situations irrespective of how intractable those seem. And when we do that, we begin to introduce that possibility for change within it.

[0:19:02] RT: So, first of all, I want to tell listeners that we'll have show notes here and there's an article or a piece that you wrote and there's a graphical portrayal of the cruciform of agency. The reason I mentioned that is let's now give them with that context kind of if you can. I noticed a challenge because we're talking about a visual description here and you're gonna have to narrate it without listeners being able to see that for the moment. But I am one of those people who have been now faced with a kind of condition whereby there's a lot of moral dilemmas that I have to choose from. And I'm trying to figure out how to make this call. I believe that the model you've created helps facilitate a thought process, a broader, more wise thought process, to get to a decision even though it's not going to be perfect. But at least it accounts for the things that need to be accounted for before deciding. Help people understand a little bit about what are the elements that are at play that have to be accounted for so that they get a feel for how this framework can be useful to them.

[0:20:01] AM: Well, in relation to the social aspect of things, there's the things that have come before you. There's the traditions, there's the customs, there's the practices which exist within, within a workplace, within an organization, within a society. The way things have been done in order to do what that workplace, organization, society is doing. There's that. Then in relation to the social aspect of things, there's also the outcomes you want to achieve as a leader. There's the strategic aims you want to set. There's the objectives you want to obtain. Those are very much social aspects of it that relate to the past and the future.

Within the present, there is the decision-making itself. That's something you have to decide, "Are we going to allocate resources in this way or are we going to set rules that way? Are we going to tolerate the practices in another way?" There's what's past, what has been happening before, the rules and resources of an organization. What's in the future? The outcomes you hope for? And then in the present, there is the decisions which have to be made. Those are the social aspects of the choice.

In relation to the personal aspects of the choice, there is the conscience that you have. There is the morals and values that you bring to that conscience, which you've settled for yourself over

the course of your life up to that point. There's the experiences that you have in terms of, "I know this might work because it's worked there. I know that might not work because I tried that before." There's that conscience that you bring to things.

Then there's your future self, which is how you would hope to become? What's the sort of person you want to be? And then in the present, there is you as the decision maker. A metaphor for the presidency around the time of Abraham Lincoln, if you read biographies of Lincoln as I used to do, was chief magistrate of the nation. Not commander in chief. Not chief executive. And I've always thought that that's perhaps a better metaphor for leadership than many of the ones we currently use because so much of leadership is about choice-making, about listening to the arguments of different advocates and then making a decision in relation to that. And that is you in the present where you're trying to make a decision. You become the magistrate of that decision. And the outcome of that decision is going to lead to the outcomes, good or bad, for the social. But it's also going to lead to outcomes for you yourself.

Are you the person who has flubbed the decision, who has made a wrong decision, who has made an immoral decision because you've privileged different aspects of this cruciform of the agency perhaps over your own conscience? And those are the key aspects of choice-making that sit within the cruciform. And they're all parts which you should be considering whenever you're thinking about particularly momentous choices, particularly choices which are going to have real consequences for the lives of other human beings. And those come up perhaps more often than you might think whenever you're a young person studying business, or engineering, or whatever your initial professional focus might be. But if you're not prepared to think about those things, you will end up, I think, disappointing yourself and being ill-prepared for making the consequential decisions whenever they finally face you.

[0:23:38] RT: It strikes me, I hadn't thought of this until you're describing this now. When you were in your position and you were looking at bringing people into the organization, was this model a bit of a way to do an interview process to see where people might find themselves in these dimensions?

[0:23:55] AM: It's interesting you said that. Because until you mentioned it right now, I hadn't thought of that either. But I think it might be a good idea. I'll have to think about that in the future.

But it definitely might be. Yeah, I think there's probably some value in asking people about their decision-making and asking them and considering whenever they're answering that question whether their answers indicate that they're aware innately off those aspects of a choice. Because if they're – and I think about it now. I think one person who I've worked with who really turned out to be a moral vacuum whenever we were talking to him in an interview about how he had made a difficult choice. That difficult choice that he had made tended to be the way described was very much a following order sort of answer.

Looking back in it now, and I haven't looked back on it until you've raised this question right now, that should have been a red flag at the time. I think there's probably value there, but I honest to God had not thought of it until you mentioned it. And that makes me quite happy. It shows that there's legs in a model if it's beginning to help people think different ways about things that are important and which you perhaps hadn't considered that there was any relationship to before this.

[0:25:19] RT: Yeah, I will put my own angled plug in here for when I was reading about it. I thought it was quite helpful just from a diagnostic standpoint in that you're putting me in several different positions to look at the system and the challenge than I would probably naturally be predisposed to do. Much less, I probably wouldn't even identify those dimensions. I'm myopic right from the start and I don't get out of that. And so I think just the visual and the question provoking that you raise for those areas is at least a healthy start for a lot of people who are trying to contend with this stuff.

[0:25:56] AM: I certainly hope so and that's very much why I put it out there.

[0:25:59] RT: All right. But you've expanded your area focus and concerns. You also write in the book about the condition of the planet and the environment and that we are on a very short leash and the opportunities we have to do something about it are passing quickly. So the question that I have is we need a lot of people with this capacity that you're putting forth, not just the ethical stand, but also the diagnostic capability to use themselves. How do we mobilize more people to foster a movement to address the stuff? Because my own view is it's hard to get the elected officials mobilized in a coherent way. It's got to come a kind a protest, like you said,

ground up at least. And we know we've got people active. But how do we mobilize them into a coherent force from your experience in doing the work that you've done?

[0:26:50] AM: I mean, I would like to think that all those terrible things that the people say about universities, that they're the hotbed of the woke, I would like to see that becoming true. I would like to see academics, and leadership, and business, and organization really engaging with their students about this and recognizing. I saw a piece by John Oliver a few months ago where he was pointing out about all those kids who, in the 1960s and 70s, were being called troublemakers on their university campuses because of leading protests against the Vietnam War, or for civil rights, or for gay rights. They're all moving into increasingly important leadership positions now and making positive changes in the world. I think that's part of the hope that we have to have.

I mean, I think many, many elected officials have become increasingly radicalized and cynical over these past few years. I don't find that I'm mellowing as I get older. I think many elected officials have literally been bought off by vested interests. And so in those sorts of situations, they have to become more fearful of something else. And the thing that they should become fearful of is the citizen, and the active citizen, and the citizens mobilizing in their communities and in their workplaces and the choices that they are making.

People may say, "Well, perhaps the workplace is not something that one should regard as a political forum." But it is. I mean, businesses will engage with governments over issues like taxes, taxation policy, corporate legislation, perhaps also over health and safety and environmental issues. Well, there's life-affirming ways that can do that, and there's destructive ways that they can do that. And the more that they are engaging in life-affirming ways, the better.

The 2015 Modern Slavery Act in the UK was originally conceived by the government as essentially purely a criminal, a piece of criminal law. And it was activation and advocacy by British business which made the government introduce what's now known as the transparency and supply chain laws into that bill which requires all businesses trading with the UK to report on what they're doing in order to deal with the challenges of forced labor and slavery in their supply chains. Now that's direct consequence of business advocacy.

I and many of my colleagues in non-governmental organizations have been calling for that sort of thing for a long time and got absolutely nowhere with government who dismissed us essentially as trivial people, as unrealistic people, as people who didn't understand the real world in business. Therefore, whenever business came along and said, "No, no, we agree with these people. We think this is important for us. We'd like to have it." The weight that sort of challenge carried was extremely important and in fact decisive in obtaining that legislation.

And you see that also in terms of the Bangladesh Fire Safety Accord after the collapse of Rana Plaza where businesses which were sourcing garments from Bangladesh went to the Bangladesh Government and said, "You need to do something much, much more robust about ensuring the factories are safe in Bangladesh. Otherwise, we'll have great difficulty sourcing from you," which led to extremely important improvements in fair safety in Bangladesh's government factories. That would again not have happened without businesses engaging government that way.

Businesses need to understand that they have got a role, and a responsibility, and a potentiality to obtain positive and progressive change that they need to realize with the utmost urgency. Otherwise, the planet in which they're doing business is not going to have very much of a future.

[0:31:08] RT: Let's link something here. I'm wondering if I'm going to link something here. Let's find out if we do. So you raised a challenging question in the book for the reader. And I wrote it down here. How do some people resist the social pressures and instead chart their own moral course?

Now, we got the Martin Luther King's, and the Gandhi's, and the Nelson Mandela's, and John Hume who I want to come to here in a little bit. But from your perspective, what's your view on what you've learned about those people who have made that call? And how has it turned out for them?

[0:31:41] AM: There's three examples which I generally talk about whenever I'm talking about this. Three examples relating to the three basic reasons why people seem to make the right call. The first one is sometimes called, essentially, the Casablanca effect. It's the idea of the love of

another person. So if you're opposed with the challenge, which is unethical, then you might think to yourself, "What would that nice woman, Ilsa, say, who I've just started seeing again. What would she say if she knew I was collaborating with these evil Nazis?" And it's that idea of the love of another person and not wishing to diminish yourself in their eyes. That's a very real thing.

There was a doctor I was talking to in Glasgow whenever I was doing my doctoral research, and he described how he shifted from being essentially a salesman for a lot of the pharmaceutical organizations to becoming a very robust critic of them. And he said he was about to be flown out to somewhere nice to take part in a pharmaceutical conference. And he was sitting in the kitchen with his wife telling her about this and the five-star treatment that he was looking forward to. And she was making the dinner and she said to him, "In the course this has made, you've sold out." And he said this is somebody you'd known since he was 19. And the thing about it was she wasn't saying it in an accusatory sort of way. She was just stating a fact. And he realized to himself, "She's right. I have sold out." And it gave enough perspective to him on what he had become that it gave from the basis upon which you could change. That's the Casablanca effect. And the Casablanca effect is that love of another person and what they might think of you.

The second thing is essentially guilt. You've done something in the past or shame. You've done something in the past which is transgressed and you're thinking to yourself, "I'm not going to do that again." There was a doctor that I interviewed again, of course, of my doctoral research and she had – she was a very junior doctor. She'd been pressurized into performing her procedure in a child which she did not feel she had been properly trained for and it should have been a much more senior doctor doing it. But because of the circumstances, she was pressurized by her boss into doing it. And it fortunately turned out well but she said she thought to herself after this, "That was such a terrible thing to do. I should not have put myself in that position. I should not have allowed myself to be put in that position." Essentially, bullied into doing something that she didn't feel she was qualified to do. And she said, "That's not something I'm ever going to do ever again. And I'm not going to do that, allow that to happen to anybody ever again."

And in literature, that's the Lord Jim effect, which is in Conrad's novel, Jim makes a catastrophic decision where he betrays and essentially sends, he believes, to their deaths, a whole bunch of

people who are depending on him. And that becomes a basis upon which then he turns his life around and becomes the most moral person that you can possibly imagine because he's not going to do that again.

Then the third one is where you actually have worked out what your morals are even before contact with the challenges of the world. And perhaps what for me anyway was a striking example is a chap you may have heard of called Jim Thompson. He was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. And during the My Lai massacre he noticed and recognized what was happening on the ground and he recognized the massacre that was happening.

He interposed this helicopter between advancing American troops and a small group of Vietnamese civilians and said that to the Americans, to his own comrades, "If you come any further, I'll kill you and save the lives of these people as a result of that." Thompson was a Methodist and he had literally thought to himself, "What does it mean to be a Christian soldier?" Ever before he came in contact with Vietnam, and he'd drawn lines for himself, and a very basic thing for many people is that you don't murder civilians. And so he was prepared to put his life on the line as a result of that because he understood what his morals and values were. Now, you don't have to be a Christian to adopt that position. You can be an atheist, you can be a Buddhist, you can be Jewish, you can be a Hindu, or a Muslim, or anything in between. What does matter is that you understand what your values are and you're prepared to live by them even when the most horrendous crisis and the most difficult circumstance presents itself. And those are the three bases, I think, upon which good people do good things irrespective of the social pressures to the contrary.

[0:36:35] RT: I'm just curious in your journeys, how often do you come across people who've done their own self-diagnosis, and assessing other values, and right and wrong and use those as a basis to guide and direct themselves under these kind of conditions that are invariably going to find us somewhere in our journey in life?

[0:36:52] AM: I think it's rare enough. I think many of us prefer not to think of the worst-case scenario. But as we all know going through life, the worst-case scenario tends to catch up with us sooner or later. So it certainly seems to be – I did a lot of my empirical research amongst the medical profession. And that seems to be a profession where there is considerable thought

done because the high volume of highly complex moral issues which doctors have to deal with mean that they are a profession, which as soon as they go through a hospital door for the first time, they know they're going to be facing these sorts of issues. They seem to have done a lot of thinking about it and developed a lot of guidance around it.

My original profession was as a civil engineer. The work that we did on that was negligible. But as I say, whenever I went to work in places like Africa, Angola, and Ethiopia, or Afghanistan on was meant to be a technical set of projects doing water supply, those issues immediately started to pop up. Where do you put the well? How much water are you going to share around the place? Who gets it? Who doesn't get it? Because you only have a limited set of resources. And those can become quite troubling questions to begin with.

[0:38:11] RT: I can't let you go by having grown up in Northern Ireland without you bringing your views of John Hume and the work that he did in the country and also in the context of perhaps your model, when you retrospectively look at John Hume's work and how it aligned perhaps or didn't align with the Crucible model. Because I think for a lot of listeners, they know Gandhi, they know Martin Luther King. John Hume, even though he's equal to them in every way, shape, or form, my view here, a lot of people don't know him as well. He's a seminal person in the history of society. What's your views and how did he inform you and the work that you've done or even the work we all should be doing?

[0:38:56] AM: I think there's a number of things about Hume which are significant. I mean, I think he is a very good model of how the cruciform of agency works. And I have a short case study of him. One of the famous lines that he used to use was, "You can't eat a flag." And his understanding was that there should be some – politics should be about improving people's lives and just having it around issues of identity. And party was not something which was going to be in any ways or for anybody beyond the literature obsessed with those things. He was very much interested in doing useful things, doing good things with politics.

Initially, anti-poverty work around the credit unions in Ireland to break the old of usurers' money lenders on the poor people of, first of all, the city of Derry and then beyond. But then moving into challenges for civil rights, for proper representation for all of the people of the north of Ireland

and then beyond that into the struggle for peace whenever British policy and IRA reaction to that led to a very protracted and bloody civil war in the north of Ireland.

And I think he was very much an example of somebody who had that dogged physical and moral courage to carry him through extremely – the word ghastly is the only way to describe. An extremely ghastly war which was seemed intractable to so many people. There was a political scientist called Richard Rose who came out with a famous line at one stage which was the problem with Northern Ireland is that there is no solution. And that's how an awful lot of people felt about it. But as Joanne Murphy often says, "Well, the key thing that a human recognized was we need to make this problem bigger. We need to take it up to another level and engage more stakeholders on it in order to bring different pressures to bear and also to contextualize this in a way that is taking account of all of the different issues which are affecting people." He talked about the totality of relationships between. It wasn't just a problem between the communities in the north of Ireland, but between both parts of Ireland and then between Ireland and Britain. And unless one was able to think about that in those contexts, one was never going to be able to solve it.

And what he also discerned at an early stage was that Europe and the European Union provided a basis upon which these relationships could be resolved. Northern Ireland worked more or less from about 1998 when the Good Friday Agreement was signed until 2016 when the UK decided to leave, well England decided that the UK should leave the European Union. And that was undermining the fundamental basis upon which peace in the north of Ireland had been achieved.

In the poem *Eastern, 1916*, Yeats wanders about the morality of rebellion. And he says, "Well, maybe England will keep faith. Maybe they will fulfill their promises." He wonders about that. And I think in 2016 we discovered that England will not keep faith. We can never trust this. If one's hoping that they will act in your interests, it's a forlorn hope because their fantasies and prejudices are always going to take priority over your interests and your peace, particularly if you're Irish.

I think that was something which I'm sort of relieved that Hume didn't live to see that. But I think he's one of the exemplars of the idea that politics can be a noble profession. There's few

enough of those in history. There's, God knows, few enough of those in the contemporary Western world at least. But he is one of them. And I hope those kids who are being victimised for protesting for peace on the campuses of North America remember the likes of him, the likes of Martin King, the likes of Bobby Kennedy Sr. whenever they are on the receiving end of the opprobrium, and hatred, and lies of the establishment and try to make the world a better place because it can be done, though it is a torturous process.

[0:43:35] RT: One last sort of question in this context. Could you talk about this? I'm a believer in it. And that is the potency of narrative. Purposefully designed narrative. The elements that you use. And I know in Hume's case, he believed in telling the same story over and over again. But that was a narrative of choice that he had constructed. In your experience, for people who may not think of that as an element, what do you know about the potency of narrative and how would you advise people to think about organizing their narrative for what they're trying to get done in the world?

[0:44:13] AM: I mean, to say that narrative as potent is an important truth to understand. To develop potent narrative is one of the most difficult things in the world. Abraham Lincoln famously said to Harriet Beecher Store, whenever he met her, he said, "Oh, sir, you're the woman who wrote the little book that caused this great war." And he wasn't really joking. It was whenever *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published and humanized what slavery meant for so many readers, that made the toleration of slavery in the South ever more difficult and the ideal of having an anti-slavery candidate obtaining the presidency ever more likely.

That grabbed the attention of people. And certainly, when everyone looks at politics, at political news reporting, at business news reporting, it's all about the narrative. I mean, businesses, organizations, all sorts of people, all sorts of money in order to try and develop for them narratives, which are going to be convincing and sympathetic and draw people through them.

Hume's example of [inaudible 0:45:22] narrative, which is showing that persistence can work. And the bigger the audience it got, he was pushing the same narrative all through. Biographers of Bobby Kennedy Sr. pointed out that that's also what he was doing in 1968, the same narrative everywhere. He said the same thing to black inner-city communities as he said to white rural communities. He was never caught out with – or he said this. His vision was a

unifying vision and about bringing people together and he said it everywhere and built his momentum as a result of that.

There's an element of an importance of consistency in this as well. But also, I think one wants to try and establish logic to it also and try and make the narrative that you are developing appealing to the needs and interests of those who you are speaking to. It's not something which should be some esoteric vision which you think is important, but it should be something which resonates in the lives of others. Otherwise, you can develop no sort of movement around that.

And I think one other thing and this is maybe a thing which is I've noticed about academics. It's oftentimes when some academics, particularly younger academics are speaking, they will often tell you whenever they're speaking about the methodology that they've used because that was one of the most – or they'll tell you about the thing that was most difficult for them to resolve in order to complete their research. That might be the methodology or it might be the literature, it might be the theory, it might be all sorts of things. That's maybe important for them. It's not necessarily the importance of the research which is about the findings and the implications and the consequences of that in the real world.

Be aware of that, that what's most difficult or interesting to you may not be the thing that is most important about your research, your work, your life. And try and communicate that. Because if you can communicate that with truth to other people, then there is a strong possibility that it will be meaningful to them also and therefore a basis upon which you can develop understanding, develop movements, develop compassion and empathy for each other.

[0:47:49] RT: Okay. I'm going to shift gears here. And you're going to love my little bridge here. You and I met in Birmingham a couple of months back at a leadership conference put on by our friend, Joanne Murphy and a few others. Joanne told me at the conference, she goes, "You have to meet Aiden. He needs to be on your podcast." I said, "Well, who is Aiden?" And she proceeded to provide the very quick description of your attributes and your experiences. And I was getting a sense that she was spot on.

But she closed with this line before she took me across the room and we met at the table. You remember that? She goes, "Aiden, he's just a renaissance man." And so, as I begin to prepare

for this, I begin to see what our friends Joanne Murphy was talking about. A lot of listeners, and I was included in this, have never heard of the BBC Mastermind Show. But I did learn that is a big deal. And so, I'm going to ask you to brag a little bit about your achievements on the Mastermind show. And in order to do that, please give people a context for what the show is about and how difficult it is.

[0:48:54] AM: Well, Mastermind, the story of Mastermind is that it was the brainchild of a BBC producer who had been a member of the Special Operations Executive during the Second World War. They were the people who organized and collaborated with the resistance across Europe to do sabotage and other things. And he had been captured and interrogated as part of his war time experiences.

As a way of trying to exercise these experiences, he came up with the idea for Mastermind, which is modeled allegedly on an interrogation, the prisoner of war interrogation. You're sat in a big black chair in a spotlight. The only other person you can see in that stage is the person asked you the questions. And it starts off with name, occupation, specialist subject. And this is modeled on the name, rank and serial number which prisoners of war are asked for immediately.

And then there's two rounds. The first round is on a specialist subject which you choose and the second round is general knowledge. The specialist subjects which I chose started off with the life of Michael Collins, who was an Irish revolutionary. And then second round, I did the novels of Dennis Lehane, who's a Boston crime writer. I think one of the best in the business at the moment. And then the final, I did the life of Abraham Lincoln.

One of the things I discovered afterwards, which I knew was that Michael Collins came from Clonakilty, which is a town in County Cork. What I discovered as I was doing the research was the Dennis Lehane's people came from Clonakilty, which is the same town in County Cork. I have not yet found a connection between Abraham Lincoln and Clonakilty, but I'm still looking for it. I think it might be out there somewhere.

Yeah, so it's three rounds. There's about 100 people get to start. My view is that of that 100 people, probably any one of 20 could win. But there's an element certainly of luck to the

questions fall right for you on the night. But there's also a question of nerve, which is, because it's a high-pressure interrogation. All right. The hard work, luck and nerve, I think is a lot of lessons for life coming from that. If you put in hard work, hold your nerve and have a bit of luck, you can be successful. And if you don't put in the hard work, you're not going to even have a chance no matter how much luck comes your way.

[0:51:23] RT: And so my question when I was looking at this, why Lincoln? What's it about Abraham Lincoln that draws you?

[0:51:29] AM: He's always in common with many people. He comes across the 19th century as one of the most attractive human beings of that century, of much of human history. There's something about him, I think, that everybody who likes Lincoln, knows Lincoln, thinks that it's almost like a special relationship. And that I think also has to do with his gift for writing and his gift for speaking.

Bruce Springsteen also, I think, has that. I mean, people who love Springsteen feel they have the most special relationship with Bruce Springsteen. There's that level of genius. Maybe Heaney had it as well, Seamus Heaney. There's that level of genius comes across. I think he's a particularly strong example of what we were talking about a little while ago about the importance of narrative and how, essentially with the Gettysburg address in particular, he re-fashioned the whole context and understanding of the American Civil War with the power and simplicity of his narrative.

I think Shelby Foote in his history of the American Civil War, he essentially says that he felt that Lincoln remade the American language. And I think there is that sense of American literature before Lincoln was much more flowery language, quite influenced by a notion of literacy and literature. And after Lincoln, when you move into people like Mark Twain being a much more direct, much more plain-spoken sort of literature. And Shelby Foote, I think, if I recall correctly, attributes that directly to Lincoln and Lincoln's way of speaking and the way his speech is resonated through American society for such a period of time.

I mean, the other thing about Lincoln is that he just comes across history as a nice man. And he's one of those examples. Because lots of people think, in order to be a successful leader,

you have to be ruthless, selfish, a complete bastard. And Lincoln was one of the most successful presidents. And a major foundation of his success was how nice a human being he was. And so he attracted people to him. He was a loyal friend. They were loyal to him. They recognized his genius. They helped push him forward. He was the first person to draw into his cabinet, people who had been his opponents for the Republican nomination, something which had become more common since then. But he was the first person to do it.

Even people like Seward, who was the Secretary of State, he thought, "Who is this guy? I'm much smarter than him." Realized after a while that, actually, no, no, that's not quite the way it is. And became a deeply loyal friend consequently. He's an important leadership exemplar in that regard in that he shows that leadership doesn't necessarily have to be a zero-sum game, doesn't necessarily require that level of ruthlessness. Can be something which is obtained with generosity of spirit. Can be something which is obtained with basic human decency. And particularly whenever that's in the cause of human dignity, that somebody who still speaks to us are coming up on 200 years after his death.

[0:54:53] RT: We're in search of another Lincoln in my country.

[0:54:55] AM: We certainly are in search for another Lincoln, yeah. I don't know. I don't know who might be a prospect. I don't even want to risk a prediction anymore. I mean, I was very much an admirer of Joe Biden for many years, right back to the 1980s, when I remember him being a ferocious opponent of apartheid in South Africa. I think he deserves the ignominy of history. He disgraced himself. He disgraced his country in a way which I hope never be forgotten or forgiven.

It's utterly appalling that even more than Trump, being the consequence of Biden's presidency, is the fact that now, for much of the world, particularly for much of the global south, there is a deep belief that there is no moral difference between the foreign policies of the United States, much of the Western world, Vladimir Putin and Russia. That's an appalling, appalling outcome. It's a bleak time. But again, as another great American leader, Frederick Douglass once said, "We do not have the luxury of despair. We have to continue to resist. We have to continue to protest and campaign. We have to continue to assert a narrative of a better world."

I'm sure you've heard, somebody said, "If you ever wondered what you have done in Germany in the 1930s, it's what you're doing now." I think we need to continue to protest. We need to continue to write. We need to continue to write to our elected representatives and everyone else and just say there must be a more moral way about the world which values all human life equally, irrespective of the color of their skin or the tenets of their faith.

[0:56:59] RT: Okay. Last question. You said a little while ago, early on in our conversation, that you're not mellowing with age. What is ahead for you?

[0:57:08] AM: Continuing to write. Continuing to try and make positive contributions towards the work of others. Continuing to try and help people along the way. I mean, I just missed, unfortunately, appointment as UN Special Rapporteur on slavery, wherever that last became due. I'd like to think I have one more major job in me before I finally put my feet up, but it would need to be a consequential job rather than just something to fill in the days. The work I'm doing at the moment, I'm working as an independent consultant at the moment in relation to human rights in general and slavery and human trafficking in particular. That keeps me busy enough. That keeps the bills paid. That, I think, makes useful contribution to the lives of others. But I would certainly like to feel that I have, perhaps, one more major job in me before I finally put my feet up.

Yeah, trying to continue just to rage, rage against the dying of the light, because it's the only thing we can do in these circumstances.

[0:58:18] RT: Aidan McQuade, thank you very much for making time for this conversation. It's very helpful.

[0:58:22] AM: Thanks so much for having me, Rick. It's been an absolute pleasure.

[0:58:25] RT: You're welcome.

[OUTRO]

[0:58:28] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders with Rick Torseth. Please take this moment and hit subscribe to follow more leadership swamp conversations.

[END]