

of really crazy things, and that made people more sympathetic to the party of outsider knowledge.

But look, now the party of outsider knowledge is in power —

But let me add to that story just in one way: I think the polarization had already happened. And that's actually part of what that period represented.

One of the things Democrats didn't have during that period was actually enough skepticism of the institutions of official knowledge.

I think you would agree that the people pushing a lot of the ideas that you see as destructive from them — and some of them, I probably also feel, were ultimately destructive — were doing so wrapped in the garb of official knowledge, wrapped in credentials coming out of universities, etc.

It was in part actually an institutional monoculture on the Democratic side that created a loss of some antibodies that might have created some friction between that and going way too far. And now you have the other side in power, also without any antibodies.

Yes. And I think one of my disappointments about the Trump administration in the first three months is just how pure and uncut its outsiderism seems to be.

I think it was an open question when Trump was re-elected: Would R.F.K. Jr. be running H.H.S.? Or would he be running the president's council on making America healthy again? And we got the timeline where he's running H.H.S.

And you can multiply examples. And I think in many of those examples, you can see a version of the problem that I identified to you just now, you can see it in the trade and tariffs debate, this assumption that the experts got something big wrong and therefore, Peter Navarro should make trade policy. And the second does not follow from the first.

The huge challenge for conservatism right now is to figure out how you generate some kind of stability of actual expertise in a party that is now temperamentally completely anti-establishment, populist and so on.

And I think there was a hope that the Silicon Valley faction that migrated into the Republican camp, in part in reaction to some of the failures of expertise that you just acknowledged, would play a version of that role. And I think definitely Elon Musk has not played a version of that role to date.

So the Republican Party is a party in search of a stable system of official knowledge generation besides whatever Donald Trump decides — and doesn't have one at the moment for the foreseeable future.

Always our final question: What are three books you'd recommend to the audience?

So I'm going to give three books on religion that connect to my attempt to shift what official knowledge or the official knowledge of New York Times podcast listeners think about religion.

The first one is a book from about 20 years ago by a physicist named Stephen Barr called "Modern Physics and Ancient Faith" that, I think despite being a little bit dated, is still really the best overall survey of where arguments in modern physics that relate to religion stand, and how a reasonable person might think about it. It's not a dogmatic book. It's a very open-minded and interesting book. So that's Book 1.

Since we were talking about near-death experiences, there are a million books about near-death experiences — many of them bad. I think for people who are interested in this subject, one recommendation would be a book called "After" by Bruce Greyson, who's, I think, a psychiatrist or neuroscientist from the University of Virginia, who just has a good overview, from a perspective of a practicing physician, of why people take these strange stories seriously and why it might unsettle a materialist worldview.

And the third book — I mean, honestly, Ezra, maybe this is unnecessary since you conceded so much ground to the mysterians. But I think a final book that's useful to people who listen to this show and are like: What are these two guys smoking, talking about consciousness like this?

This is a book that was very controversial in the philosophical community when it came out. It's called "Mind and Cosmos" by Thomas Nagel, who's a famous philosopher — not religious — but arguing for the fundamental limits and problems with a materialist framework on the world.

It is a very short book, which is why I don't hesitate to recommend it. A lot of books about consciousness are not short, but this one, I think, you can read and get a sense of why intelligent people might at least be inclined toward an Ezra Klein-style mysterian — if not quite toward the militant Catholicism of Ross Douthat.

Ross, I enjoyed it a ton. Thank you very much.

I enjoyed it, as well, Ezra. Thank you so much.