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Peter Brown

John Plotz:

From Brandeis University, welcome to Recall This Book, where we assemble scholars and writers from different disciplines to make sense of contemporary issues, problems, and events. I'm John Plotz. And this is the second episode of our pandemic-interrupted mini season on money, Recall This Buck.

I'm lucky enough to be joined today by Peter Brown, who is the Rawlins Professor of History Emeritus at Princeton. He's often regarded as the inventor of the field of late antiquity. And he does indeed, as Wikipedia alleges, know 26 languages. Recall This Book felt that professor Brown's two recent books, *The Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West 350 to 550 AD* and *The Ransom of the Soul* made him the perfect person to talk to us about the moment that older Greek and Roman ideas of solidarity through citizenship are replaced by a new kind of universal transgenerational and institutional Christian Church run by what Brown calls *managerial bishops*.

We are anxious to hear his thoughts on whether that change--a really epochal and world-influencing change in the conception of charity and the conception of value and what it means to be rich--whether that change has something to do with the new kinds of wealth that flooded the late Roman Empire as wheat gave way to gold as the key form of currency. That is what Peter Brown calls *the magic of wealth*.

Professor Brown, since our focus today is your argument about changing conceptions of wealth and the notion of treasure in heaven in late antiquity and the early centuries of Christianity--which is primarily laid out in that wonderful book that I see over there, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, as well as in the two books that followed it--can I just ask you to begin by situating that work, maybe in the context of your other work and emphasizing what seems crucial about it?

Peter Brown:

Wow. That's a big request. No, let me see, why did--I think it was because I had begun, as you probably know, earlier dealing with basically images of the person. My *Body and Society* is very much about moral codes, what people thought their bodies were like. But what I was constantly working towards was to put the moral authority of Christian bishops and Christian monks in as wide and convincing a social context as I could, having spent a lot of time doing the history from the inside, as it were, in *Body and Society*. And there, I was immensely helped by one book, which finally came roughly when I arrived in Berkeley, that was Evelyne Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance*.

Now that was a very exciting book for me because we had done a lot on the actual nitty-gritty of the social history of the later [Roman] Empire. And I think it's important as I think I made rather plain at the beginning of *Body and Society*, this was a real growth point. Things had changed. A lot of the textbook generalizations about great landowning, about Imperial despotism, all of these had been well and truly chipped. So it was a real open field. What Evelyne did was something even more exciting, which was say, *yes, but this is, this is not only this, this is also society, which is coming to see itself differently*. And she and her French colleague, Paul Veyne, both pointed out the extent to which the classical world was in that way, a pre-economic world. Social status by Imperial office or noble office, like the Chinese lists of noble titles, that's how people actually saw the world.

I mean, obviously poverty and wealth were there. There was great poverty. There was great wealth and people resented one and often had compassion for the other, but somehow these people were first and foremost seen as: "is he a *cives*, Is he a citizen? Has he got his green card?" I mean nowadays you can understand that. And Evelyne Patlagean showed brilliantly was the way in which that categorization collapsed, you know, real social movement. She, she ascribed to overpopulation just simply there were too many poor around the system broke down. I didn't totally agree with her on that one, but to have somebody who pointed out, why are the rich and the poor so *present* in the evidence? And this is not simply, and I think this is the important thing is not simply because Christian compassion for the poor or Jewish compassion for

the poor became more and more strong.(Though I think that element of differing attitudes to the poor from the Old Testament onwards, that is a pre-classical world, where actually rich and poor had two meanings, but not necessarily economic.) But to see how a society, which in some ways remained very continuous with itself, saw itself differently. A sudden awareness, I mean. I think analogies are the sudden appearance of many more homeless people than we want to think. Those sorts of things. So it was more than just the sort of nitty-gritty *who was wealthy? How did they get the wealth? Who were the poor? How much did the wealthy look after the poor?* You had to actually have the terms *wealthy* and *poor*. It was like putting on a new pair of spectacles.

Plotz:

But if I understand--and forgive me, I didn't actually get this from your book--you're saying that that, that new set of terms actually has an antecedent pre-classical history?

Brown:

Yes, that's very important because I think one of the things which has always interested me actually since... I learned Hebrew after I finished writing my biography of Saint Augustine, and one of the reasons is obviously Hebrew is the way into the Semitic languages, and I was intending to work. The other one was already I noticed that with people like Augustine, their language of society had already become *Judaized*. That is to an extraordinary degree Augustine who never knew a word of it and had a rather tawdry Latin translation of the Old Testament. He was constantly being--Jerome was constantly jibing of about how little he knew--had nonetheless picked up some of the basic units of Hebrew thought, the really big ones. And one of the big ones was a specific polarity, which is basically God: man, rich: poor. Polarity of dependence and justice.

Plotz:

Would you make an economic argument about the existence of that polarity in the pre-classical or non-classical Hebrew tradition or would it...?

Brown:

Yes, no, not so much the Hebrew tradition. You see it in ancient Egypt very strongly, I think. And what it ends up is with a world Yes, where the powerful are very powerful. Yes. But--and I think this is important—there's an extraordinary combination of acceptance of sharp hierarchy and horror of violence. Now these are two, they're rather paradoxical, but I think that was partly what it is. That is certainly in a, certainly in Hebrew--but I think not only in Hebrew in, in say Akkadian--you, you have a real sense of a binary organization by which the rich can be rich, but they must give justice. It's a more, it's legal, rather than economic.

Plotz:

I see. That is very interesting.

Brown:

And therefore the language of the Psalms, which is constantly bugging God as the rich man to *do something for me*, you know? And, and also there's wonderful messianic Psalms by which justice shall come down like dew upon the mountain side. And I think that was, that was very, that for me was actually very moving. Being used to these ferocious Athenian democracies when nobody is allowed to get bigger than anyone else--this is a society which accepts hierarchy, but also finds oppression and violence repulsive.

Plotz:

So, so just to, I'm glad you raised the Athenian democracy question. Because I wanted to ask you about the word that I cannot pronounce, which is *civic euergetism*? Ok, now I know. So, so if you could tell us a little bit about civic.. it's obviously very important in late antiquity. And I was wondering if you could tell me about what its relationship is to those democracies--

Brown:

Okay. Now first of all, one interesting thing is the Greeks never use the word *euergetism*.

Plotz:

Even though it's a Greek word?

Brown:

It's a Greek word, a word which you can extract from Greek was used by a very rich Greek millionaire, Mr. Singros in 19th century, Athens. He was a Turkish citizen and remained so. But he lavished on independent Athens museums, public institutions, public benefactions, and he got the name of his process became euergotismos, euergotism. In normal classical Greek, it just means doing good things, but the only good things you could do, if you're a good citizen is doing good to your city. And it's that absolute, how to put it, restriction of the object of the benefaction that makes it such a heavy concept. So the senators who are prepared to spend millions on bringing crocodiles to shows in Rome wouldn't lift a penny to give it to any passing beggar.

Plotz:

And so this is the crucial notion of the civic--

Brown:

That I think is why it's so, it's all the more crucial I think looking back in the sense that by the fourth century, it's had hundreds of years, it's a cultural it's it's a--I mean, I didn't use the analogy, but it strikes me it's a bit like *courtoisie* or *chivalrie* in the Middle Ages. It's a really primary virtue.

Plotz:

And, and is it, is it continuous with that earlier Greek tradition or it only understands itself as it--

Brown:

It understands itself. And no, to a certain extent it is. I mean, there are only a few things you can do with wealth. And if the grooves are there, that's the way, that's the way it'll go. But it does mean to say that you are people who are hardwired and to suggest that somebody spend it on the poor would be

like suggesting to Mr. Mellon that it should go to the homeless rather than to building up a splendid art collection. It's the same.

“Through the eye of a needle”--that was Jesus at his wildest. And one must remember that what I partly wrote this book about was one of my, I guess in a high school one said one's *pet peeve* is that the right? My pet academic peeve was, we shouldn't take this radical language about wealth as representing the only thing Christians told to do. And therefore a lot of them went away with their tails between their legs feeling guilty that they hadn't, and that everything else was treated as a sort of rather shabby compromise. That [notion] I think takes [too seriously] that radical language, which was hyped up by people with an active interest in it, people like Jerome....Pople like Augustine were much more sane, and they realize that giving to gods, that giving to one's neighborhood weren't part of normal life in the ancient world. And I tried to get there, I get again, the unspectacular as well as the spectacular.

Plotz:

Yeah. Right. But nonetheless, a clear change. I mean, related to the poor and the wealthy...

Brown:

Oh, yes. But don't forget it is a clear change, which is crystallized in wonderfully dramatic way by a few outstanding people. But you'll note Christianity kept on much closer, if you want to know about day-to-day Christian use of wealth in relation to the poor, the first thing you should read would be the Jerusalem Talmud. The rulings in the Talmud are almost exactly the same as those in the Christian churches. That is, this division between Jewish and Christian studies, I think makes one lose a lot of what the average Christianity was, was like.

Plotz:

At this point in the conversation we shifted towards the question of what the intellectual impact on Christianity was of changes in money flow and ideas of

wealth in the Roman empire. The key question that Peter Brown discussed--and there are footnotes aplenty to this debate in the show notes for this episode on our website, so check there to be directed in other ways--was a chicken-and-egg one about Christianity's originality. Did theology drive new social forms or did new social forms or even economic developments produce a new and surprisingly enduring set of religious metaphors housed in the Christian Church? Brown's answer or answers to that question may surprise you.

I have a whole set of questions about the sort of wealth management on the part of the church--*managerial bishops*, is such a wonderful concept. But can I just get at, I don't want to pin you down to a simple direction of causality, but is Christianity, do you think just the theological possibility that's there at the right time when this mind shift occurs? Or is Christianity the, the spur, the, the reason that this wealth and poor, you know--?

Brown:

Oh that's the 64,000 dollar question. No, what I, I—let me go back to where I disagreed with say Evelyne Patlagean. Evelyne is a good French *annalist* structuralist and Paul Veyne also, they liked all of these events to happen without any Christian impact. They positively wanted and it's a very attractive view to have these major changes happening because of some general rumbling in the Roman empire.

Plotz:

And can I ask about the one point you make about that--and forgive me if it's just an incidental fact--but you talked about basically greater concentrations of wealth and the existence I think of new gold, gold *solidi*. So one of the things in this series of interviews we're interested in is the material attributes of gold itself. So whether that, whether the money is a difference-maker.

Brown:

Oh yes, no, no, no. I think there, you're absolutely right. But I, I do think that as with marriage and sexual morality, yes, the more we study it, the more I think

people have come to the conclusion that actually sermons helped. Christianity was a remarkable religion because it was a sermonizing religion. That is unusual in the word, which is used to public debate in the theatron or in the Buli[?]. A million sermons were preached in Augustine's lifetime and all over North Africa. We still haven't quite got the measure of that. So I think in ratcheting up a dilemma, which would have been there anyway, the Christians, certainly the Christians found the names for, for what they were at and gave a sort of clarity without which I just couldn't have written such a fat book. When you compare that with the lack of clarity, which say Indian historiography or Chinese wealth and poverty are handled, there's not been so clearly focused. But what you're also saying is that, yes, this is a time when people are to a remarkable degree thinking of wealth as moveable. It's something like moveable. And if you look at Augustine's sermons there are fantasies of wealth, which involve a very buoyant economy. He would say, *oh, yes, giving to the poor, it's like a traveler's check.*

Plotz:

Yes, yes. That image. I just found that in *Ransom of the Soul*.

Brown:

Thank you. That is remarkable. And I certainly I'm sufficiently an old fashioned semi-Durkheimian, social anthropologist of a rather Mary Douglas sort--if those things are considered socially possible, they become considered religiously possible. And it's hard to tell which came first. But there's certainly the idea that money can become very fluid and that therefore it can shift out of private hands into the hands of, and I think the other really important thing is the church in some ways does develop a notion of *corporate identity*.

Plotz:

Yes. That was what I hoped we could get to.

Brown:

Step by step I still haven't figured this out quite. I think a good colleague of mine, Ian Wood of Leeds University is working on it for the early Middle Ages. But the, the church gets a lot of wealth because it is seen as an eternal body in a way in which the Senate or the Roman state or your local gods were never quite seen in quite the same way.

Plotz:

And why is that? Why are they not?

Brown:

I think it is because the Bishop is never seen as an *owner*. They hold, again it's back to the Psalms, a Bishop is a *pastor*.

Plotz:

Yes. Yes. I wanted to ask you Foucault and pastoralism.

Brown:

Yeah. I didn't know that side of Foucault when it came out in 2008 it was when I had just begun to write. It was a bombshell cause those *College de France* lectures were simply not known.

Plotz:

Yes. I mean it was written in '78 or '79, but I'm the same situation. I only read them about two years ago.

Brown:

Yeah. So that came almost as an afterthought. I remember incorporating it at the very last moment. And I think he didn't quite get what the extraordinary, what that really means in terms of the double persona of the Bishop. He is a local patron. He is a man of power. There's no doubt about it. But at the same

time he actually isn't. And that, that leads to a form of impersonal continuity of wealth...

Plotz:

Yeah. And is that....does *managerial Bishop* capture that?

Brown:

I hoped it would. Because--and this, this is something which comes with great difficulty. People always like to feel they've left their-- it's a bit like modern, I mean, think of a modern benefactor an alum to Princeton who instead of getting a gym named after him becomes "general purposes" and is used for a chapel organ or something like that. People got royally pissed off about those situations. It keeps on, this is not a purely Late Antique, Early Medieval, but by the time of the early middle ages, certainly in the West, they have a language to--

Plotz:

Yeah. But so just to make sure I understand, you're saying that you really don't see that describing the Senate, describing the divinity of the Roman state or any of that.

Brown:

I'm not as good on Roman public law as I should be. But my feeling is, certainly among the wiser heads I've consulted, it is in some ways sharper, it's more impersonal and there's no doubt that the Fiscus isn't just the Fiscus, it's what the Emperor owns. So the Emperor is always a gigantic landowner and never a steward. A Bishop is constantly, and this is where again, I think if you have a totally aristocratic view, you miss that constant pressure of the average Christian communities to have somebody whom they can trust.

Plotz:

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, you said Durkheimian, but there's actually something Weberian in that analysis as well, because it's about a structure that people can be invested in. Even the point you make about the differentiation of the clergy, right? That you said that I think you said that was consumer-driven.

Brown:

Oh yeah, very much so. I mean the normal historiography, this again is one of my sort of pet peeves, the normal historiography--very much as one would imagine--emphasizes the Bishop and clergy screwing the laity screwing them ever more successfully

Plotz:

It's like Chaucer's image of the fat monks, you know, like they've got Burgundy in the back.

Brown:

Exactly. I think the clergy got really into the business of screwing in the Middle Ages and that hadn't come quite. What I think is important is as you say, it is some of these things are consumer-driven. People want monasteries because they want holy people to pray for them. They want their, their priests to be celibate. At least when they are active, as priests. In North Africa, celibacy comes to be taken for granted without any single conciliar ruling and without any debate on it--quite extraordinary.

Plotz:

How do you understand that? Do you understand that as they can't have a family because they must be devoted to this?

Brown:

Because they were, and also you don't want the family to have their dibs on the wealth of the church. So it's a way...

Plotz:

It is managerial. It's a way of making them the caretaker of the wealth that belongs to...

Brown:

I think, I really think it is. And that in an odd way, the language of kingship and priesthood in the Psalms and in parts of the old Testament gives them the formal--gives them the go-ahead--to think in those terms. And hence I think Foucault's notion of pastoral power was absolutely brilliant. I mean, it was something everyone had been assuming, but he pulled it out.

Plotz:

Right. If I understand it that you're actually criticizing a dimension that you say he doesn't get, because he wants to see the power as concentrated and therefore the attributes of the State

Brown:

Yes. Yeah. Though Foucault was an old-fashioned Catholic in a way. And therefore the power of the Church was absolutely fixed. I actually notice that.

Plotz:

Can I ask one other question about that notion of corporate being? What about the Greek city-states? You know...

Brown:

Oh, they manage their finances disastrously. They always got bankrupt because I think they really didn't have a sense of utterly independent collective. They tried it. But nobody trusted the cities. They're constantly complaining that their gifts are being misused. So no.

Plotz:

So are they basically too individualist, there's not enough buy-in to the--

Brown:

I think they're too individualist. That is, they ultimately want a patronage system where a big man is at the top (that says Greeks haven't changed.) I think they failed to, to see that to get the right balance between patronage and public. And they basically opted for patronage, which means euergetism. Which means a big man comes forward, he blows a lot of money and then goes away. And his sons lose interest and they're constantly being sued for not living up to their father's promise. And this is comparing, this is much rarer in the Christian Church. Because I think smaller issues are in--smaller sums are involved--except in the really big churches.

Plotz:

Well so, can I ask the same question about causality about this kind of corporate formation? Do you see it only in the church and do you see it because of the Church's theological attributes, or is it just the Church happens to be there at a time when this idea emerges?

Brown:

Part of me would like to think that it was just there and the Church-- I'm not so sure. I think if you look at say things like Visigothic kingship--which people don't spend their whole time looking at. It is interesting when they are dealing with what the Royal Fiscus is like, they're actually using language coming from the canons of the councils. So you can occasionally get, I think, a shift towards a tighter view of what is not personal in the wealth of a King, which actually echoes that of a Bishop and the Bishop comes chronologically first.

Plotz:

Yeah. Yeah. That's very interesting. And I guess that's a place also where your comparandum would be of interest as well.

Brown:

Yes, I think so. Yeah. I think so. Because in some ways I think part of the moral of the story is there's the later Roman empire, whatever its virtues, was a pretty rigid system and institutional experimentation isn't its favorite activity. But the Christian churches, I think precisely because they are not in the hands of the truly powerful, they're in the hands of your basically average Joe, small land owners, minor minor, city notables, who get a lot out of being a priest or being bishops...They are much more able to sort of experiment, to lay down rulings.

Plotz:

Yeah. Yeah. Interesting. Okay. Can I ask you to say more about going back to this question of the physicality of money that it seems like one of the important parts of your argument is that the notion of treasure in heaven has a kind of literality in the early Church.

Brown:

That's something which I feel is the case. It's very difficult to prove. But I really have a feeling that there is how to put it? an imaginative notion of how to put it, *a magic of wealth*, which means to say, it's...What's that book by Johnson? I think, *Metaphors We Live By*? There are some metaphors that really are dynamic. Our analogies, look at our analogies taken from the internet now. For almost everything--and the upbeat-ness. We will look very silly. Just as when we now look at Bishop sermons and finding Augustine laboriously likening now alms-giving to one of those waterwheels raises the water. We say ha ha ha but *no*, this is a real living metaphor for that time. I still don't know how it works, but it seems to work.

Plotz:

So in terms of the question of the, where the causality goes there, the, the wealth of the Roman Empire and the possibility of that kind of liquidity of the system that goes away in the Middle Ages. And yet the conceptions that are linked to it--

Brown:

Exactly, are set to survive. Which of course is one of the fascinating things about... that's why I very deliberately went beyond the technical fall of the Roman Empire, because I wanted to see how things like Augustine's notion of wealth survived. And when we say *in books* that isn't the complete truth, that survives *in imaginative models* that don't go away for a long time.

Hence when I wrote on my most, more recent book on *The Ransom of the Soul*, again this is some ways trying to make a study of what are the continuities between bodies of thought developed in a very different empire from say, Frankish Gaul in the seventh century, but none the less, how do those, how do those sort of imagined landscapes continue? One talks about the particularity of Christianity and it is, I think it is its sense that it is sociologically universal as well as geographically universal or became that. I mean, I think it began much more purely an almost *moonshot* notion that the Gospel should be preached to the ends of the earth. So if you deal with the early Christian histories, it's always "people at the ends of the earth."

Plotz:

That's interesting. Really?

Brown:

So the Ethiopians, Patrick in Ireland, it's a sort of moonshot. But then of course with people like Augustine and under his pressure, maybe because of the Donatist Schism)but I'm trying to look for the smoking ground elsewhere) You really only have a sense that these people truly believe that Christianity can become a majority religion. That is flat universalism is replaced sometime in the fourth century (and I'd give my right arm to know when, if, if it could be thought of as a when) it becomes sociologically universal. So, you really are in the world where yes you are saying, I think the same thoughts, at least in church as the poor man and as a senator. That's a really big change. And I think that Victorian England with its Christian background, went through the same crisis. And I think maybe societies do, sometimes they're more aware of this.

Plotz:

Yeah. I mean, if you, if you think about it in America for a moment, to switch sideways, you get the Civil War, which is you know, true ethical and intellectual upheaval for the country, and then you get the Gilded Age. So you got, I mean...

Brown:

One right after the other.

Plotz:

Exactly. Right. So, it would be nice. I mean, I was raised to believe in a Whiggite teleology in which these things are gradually perfecting themselves. But instead,

Brown:

They flip-slop. What, what I think is interesting is actually if I were to characterize Late Antique civilization, it's a civilization, which compared with the classical had a remarkable tolerance for anomaly. That is-- Greeks kept Greeks and classical Romans kept themselves squeaky clean by not letting in anything more than they can cope with. There was a real sense...And if you look at this say when Galen writes in Greek about medical science. He writes just sort of passing word, *I write this no more, I write this for barbarians no more than I would rate it for, for wild bears.*

Plotz:

Yeah. We know the limits--

Brown:

Totally outside this world. By the fourth century, the Emperors are one-eighth Frankish. People are obsessed by the barbarian invasions because they actually know much more about them than they had done, when they were just as bad 200 years earlier. So there is a sort of taking-in of anomalies that Christian notions of the Resurrection takes in. It takes in the body while the

classical dualism, even Plinius' very nuanced dualism allows you to basically dump the body like sort of Kleenex.

Plotz:

Yes. But if I can connect that back to a point you made earlier about the way that even in Augustine, who doesn't speak Hebrew, you nonetheless see these, you know, Semitic traditions that come through. You're not really making an argument here about the recrudescence of a kind of earlier Jewish thought. You're making an argument about in the period of Late Antiquity, there's a bunch of different conditions which suddenly force the civic euergetism, or the Roman consensus to be disrupted from various directions...

Brown:

I think that's so, but finding the [Semitic] language acts as a sort of accelerator, maybe that's the way. Certainly what sort of struck me was that one's extraordinary degree Roman writers find it hard to talk about thuggery in the countryside. I mean, they really did not. When you have, when you have descriptions of certain events and you can perhaps compare a contemporary Third-Century description to say a Fourth-Century description of the same event. You find that the Fourth Century description emphasizes violence, oppression more strongly. And very often because it's the language of the Psalms.

Plotz:

Yes. That's so interesting. Can I just ask a question? It's really the question of, not, I won't say *relevance* because that's such a flattening word, but the question of how you think about the historical *rhyme* to our own day.

Brown:

Well, I think about, I usually avoid it. Because basically as a historian, one has--basically without pushing it back into total primitivism in the way in which people like Findlay and Hopkins I think did--one has to begin by saying these are almost incommensurable societies. They really are. I would, when

somebody asks me these questions, I would always ask them, *well, what you think of your own society?*

And there's always a hidden agenda there. I am being asked to give my stamp on what they think. I remember being rung up by—a very polite, but rather disagreeable young German from the very right wing, very right wing newspaper, *Junge Freiheit* I think it was. Well, and “Now that the people had rehabilitated the barbarian invasions as an important factor, the time of the Roman empire, these things due to migrations of people, is it not Professor Brown? What therefore, Professor Brown, do you think about Turkish immigration?” But I said, “Get lost.” I really that, because it was, it was so very obvious that what they wanted me was to tick the squares in their own image of their own society. So any critique of presentism should begin in the present, not say, “Oh, no, no, it isn't like that at all.” And there I--that's the strictly academic side. The humane side is that, of course these things spark your interests, but.

Plotz:

Yeah. Well, when you mentioned “making the world safe for plutocracy,” I mean, obviously here we are post-1980 we live in this world...

Brown:

I think your notion of a rhyme is actually a very good one because there is an aesthetic sense of parallelism. I mean, one—and also urgency. I mean, there's one thing where I would be prepared to be, not presentist, but to really think of how an aspect of ancient culture, which we had tended to rather overlook as platitudinous, superficial, has now become relevant for reasons which we now understand--which is the *personalization of power*.

We always, I remember when I was in Oxford, particularly reading people like Seneca on clemency or things like this, he was an old fart. I mean, this was Victorian uplift, about how an Emperor should behave, behave. Compared with the problems of empire, you know behavior what has a behavior got to do about it? *De Ira*, what does control of anger have to do about it? And we realize now how extremely weak (and we always thought of this, certainly in well-regulated England) that nowadays, No, bureaucratic methods, legal benefits, these things out there, they control the wild, the wild beast. And do they? And I think I've come to a much greater I'm afraid it's scary, a much

greater respect for these ancient moralists because they realized that ultimately you are dealing with a world where a lot of people exercise power without any restraint whatsoever. And you know, if I were interested in understanding Mr. Putin, I would read Tacitus and Seneca. And I wouldn't think they were old farts.

Plotz:

Yeah, no, that's very helpful. I mean because I've been thinking a lot about Stoicism lately and its various forms and that. But I hadn't really thought about that political dimension.

Brown:

I think certainly my people (2nd, 3rd, 4th century)were obsessed by the personal elements of power, partly because it was the only thing they could control. You could at least get an Emperor to keep his cool, at least, with luck, and that crazily personal nature of power in the ancient world, which we love because it produces strong individuals. Would you really want to be dependent on Pericles?

Plotz:

Professor Brown, thank you so much for your time.

Brown:

Oh well I greatly enjoyed it.

Plotz:

I did as well. So, Recall This Book is hosted by John Plotz and Elizabeth Ferry with music by Eric Chasalow and Barbara Cassidy. Sound editing is by Claire Ogden and website design and social media by Kaliska Ross. We always want to hear from you with your comments, criticisms, or suggestions. And as you know, if you enjoyed today's show, we would love it if you wrote a review or rated us on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you get your podcasts. This is part of a conversation series that includes Chris Desan and Mark Blyth. So you may be

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