

It's a real honor to be introducing the internationally acclaimed Canadian author and historian Michael Ignatieff to talk about his wonderful new book *On Consolation: Finding Solace in Dark Times*.

I first met Michael in 2018 in Budapest where he was the President and Rektor of the Central European University. He had generously agreed to be a guest on my show 'How To Fix Democracy' and we talked in his office about the threat of authoritarianism to democracy around the world. As always, Michael was a couple of steps ahead of the rest of us in his prescient analysis of the illiberalism of Viktor Orban, Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump.

Borrowing from his much acclaimed biography of the great 20<sup>th</sup> century liberal political philosopher Isaiah Berlin, Michael reminded me that one defining characteristic of illiberalism was its determination to politicize everything. Whereas liberals like Berlin fought for a society in which we could, if we so choose, escape politics, so illiberalism sees everything as political. That's what distinguishes classical liberal thinkers like Michael from the new breed of neo-authoritarians like Orban and Trump who politicize everything, even private life.

In the four years since Michael and I met, of course, we've not only witnessed Russia invading Ukraine and Viktor Orban tightening his anti-democratic stranglehold on Hungary, but we've also seen the George Soros funded Central University being forced by the Orban regime to relocate its central campus from Budapest to Vienna. And, since 2018, the threat of illiberalism from both left and right has, if anything grown. This, indeed, was the conversation I had here in Amsterdam last month at John Adams with the American writer George Packer who, like Michael, is a classic liberal in his defense of our right, if we choose, to escape the political.

Michael Ignatieff still teaches history at the Central European University, but he has gone back to what I'm guessing is his first love: writing books. In contrast with many of his other books, *On Consolation* doesn't appear to be a political text. And yet it's exactly the kind of book that is both proof of, and a consequence of, a liberal society. Freedom means being able to retire into the self to find solace. And so fixing democracy means not only being able to write and publish books like *On Consolation*, but also being able to talk about them with the witty and worldly erudition derived from a remarkable lifetime of private thought and public action. So it's my great honor to introduce Michael Ignatieff, author of *On Consolation*.