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June 9, 2023, 8.00 pm

Introduction to Peter Coleman

Ellen Rees

It is my pleasure to introduce Dr. Peter Coleman, Professor of Psychology and Education at *Columbia University*. Dr. Coleman is an internationally renowned expert on constructive conflict resolution and sustainable peace across all levels from families to nations. He directs the *Morton Deutsch International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution* and is Co-Executive Director of *Columbia University's Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity*. He has written extensively and consulted in the areas of adaptive negotiation, mediation dynamics, polarization and intractable conflict, among others. Dr. Coleman has received awards nationally and internationally for his contributions in these areas.

Dr. Coleman became interested in understanding situations of intense conflict during his early work with violent adolescents. He was particularly struck when he was able to deescalate a potentially lethal standoff between an adolescent and a police SWAT team by engaging the young man in a conversation. Dr. Coleman's use of dialogue has been central. The *Difficult Conversations Lab* is one of Dr. Coleman's current initiatives for studying polarizing moral conflicts, and to see whether and how dialogue can succeed as a tool for reducing tension between opponents on highly politicized issues such as abortion and gun control. His team assesses participants' opinions on divisive issues, pairs them with rivals, and then invites them to speak together on the issue in the lab. The dialogue method includes academic research on the conditions that will encourage the development of capacities for communication.

Dr. Coleman was in analysis for many years and his wife is a psychoanalytically trained psychologist so that he brings a psychoanalytic understanding to his research and his work. His recent book, *The Way Out: How to Overcome Toxic Polarization*, was very helpful as a group of analysts at *Columbia* tried to comprehend the polarization and irrationality that was emerging in our country. He offers us all a way to understand what has happened and how we might think about moderating the social and psychological effects that have resulted.

In introducing his book, he tells of a Cherokee elder who was teaching his grandchild about life. He described the fight between two wolves inside us all. One wolf represents fear, anger, greed and ego, one joy, peace, love and hope. When his grandchild asks which wolf wins, the elder replied. The one you feed. Writing this book was his attempt to feed the compassionate wolf in us all.