

WISOCRACY THEATER UNIVERSE

WISOCRACY
WORLD CAFÉ

BEHOLDEN

An imaginary scene...

An unfolding conversation...

In a Café of Unasked Questions...

Disclaimer:
This is a work of fiction and political satire.
The conversation depicted here is imaginary
and does not represent the actual views or words
of the individuals named.

Intro Frame for Publication

In the days leading up to the high-stakes peace talks between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin — with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky pointedly sidelined — Sandy Hinden sat in conversation with AI about the deeper forces shaping global power.

The question arose: *What would happen if two of the most visible public commentators on the Ukraine war — economist Jeffrey Sachs and historian Anne Applebaum — sat down in the Wisocracy World Café and were pressed to admit who they are truly beholden to in a collapsing world?*

The AI responded by creating an imaginary scene.

What follows is that unfolding conversation — a work of political satire and theater — entitled:

Beholden
A Wisocracy Theater Universe Scene

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A Wisocracy Theater Universe Scene

CAST

- **Sanford Hinden** – Host, founder of Wisocracy; calm, patient, with a knack for disarming guests with deceptively simple questions.
- **Jeffrey Sachs** – Economist, public intellectual, advocate for negotiated peace; confident but uneasy when pressed.
- **Anne Applebaum** – Historian, political writer, advocate for defending liberal democracy; articulate, guarded, but prickled by implication.
- **Amy Goodman** – Journalist, known for independent investigative reporting; warm voice, incisive delivery.
- **Chris Hedges** – Journalist and author, known for critiques of empire and corporate power; intense, deliberate, unwavering.

SETTING

A dimly lit café with a single large window looking onto a city blurred by drizzle and streetlamps.

Inside, three mismatched chairs surround a small round table.

On it: three plain coffee cups, a flickering candle, and a carved wooden owl facing the audience.

A low, slow jazz bassline hums beneath the scene, paired with the occasional muted clink of dishes from somewhere unseen.

[Lights up.]

Sachs and Applebaum sit at the table, half-turned toward each other but not quite meeting eyes. Sanford enters slowly from stage left, carrying three steaming cups. He places one before each guest before sitting.

SANFORD

(quietly, with a small smile)

Thank you both for coming. I've been looking forward to this.

The Café of Unasked Questions doesn't serve lattes... but we do serve uncomfortable truths.

SACHS

(half-grin, leaning back)

I thought you invited me for a conversation, not an interrogation.

APPLEBAUM

(sets her handbag on the floor, crosses legs)

And I'm here for a discussion, not a trap.

SANFORD

(leans forward, elbows lightly on table)

And yet, the questions we avoid are often the ones that matter most.

So—let's start with something simple: *Who are you beholden to?*

SACHS

(sits up, defensive chuckle)

Beholden? I advocate for peace, for negotiated solutions. That's not being beholden.

SANFORD

Every stance is shaped by relationships, by networks, by funding streams. Even peace has patrons.

APPLEBAUM

(tilts head, voice cool)

Sometimes patrons are necessary. The alternative is being powerless.

SANFORD

Is it? Or is that the story the system tells to keep you aligned?

SACHS

(leans forward now, voice firmer)

You're implying corruption. I'm telling you—my work is independent.

SANFORD

Independent of what? Certainly not of capitalism.

Certainly not of the circles that keep the global table small enough to fit in a room like this one.

APPLEBAUM

(sips coffee, gaze briefly to the floor)

You're oversimplifying. The world is complicated.

SANFORD

Yes. But it's also simple: the planet is burning, and both of you—different though you are—work within systems that allow the burning to continue.

[The café door swings open. A faint jingle of a bell. Amy Goodman enters briskly, rain still in her hair, followed by Chris Hedges. Sanford looks up, unsurprised, as if the timing was inevitable.]

SANFORD

The Café has a way of bringing in those who need to be here.

GOODMAN

(removing scarf, smiling briefly at Sanford)

I heard someone finally asking the right question.

HEDGES

(sits, voice low and deliberate)

Beholden. A word the comfortable never want to define.

GOODMAN

Jeffrey, Anne—there's a world you rarely acknowledge.

Oil companies in Russia, oil companies in the U.S., playing the same game.

Profiting from extraction while leaders talk about "values" and "security."

HEDGES

And journalists and economists—knowingly or not—help legitimize it by staying inside the frame power provides.

SACHS

(leans back, hands spread slightly)

That's unfair. I've spoken against plenty of corporate abuses.

APPLEBAUM

(sits straighter, eyes narrowing)

And I've called out authoritarian regimes for years.

GOODMAN

Yes, but you both stop short of naming the financial arteries that feed those regimes—and the ones that feed yours.

HEDGES

Because to name them fully would be to risk exile from the very platforms you rely on.

SANFORD

And that is why we are here.

This café exists for the questions that threaten our invitations to the next conference, the next board, the next “dialogue” where nothing truly changes.

**[A long pause. Only the sound of rain against the window.
Sachs stares into his coffee; Applebaum drums her fingers lightly
on her cup. The candle flickers in the draft.]**

SANFORD

(soft, steady)

So — one last time — *who are you beholden to?*

**[Sachs shifts in his seat;
Applebaum's gaze drifts out the window to the dark street.
Neither answers.]**

GOODMAN

(quietly, almost to herself)

That's your answer.

HEDGES

And that's why the planet will keep burning until we stop letting silence pass for sophistication.

[Sachs rises, buttoning his coat.]

SACHS

(half-smile)

Thank you for the coffee.

[He exits without looking back.

Applebaum remains seated for a beat, then follows, her footsteps quick. The café door shuts.]

GOODMAN

They'll go back to their world.

HEDGES

And we'll keep living in the one they pretend doesn't exist.

SANFORD

(sits back, finally lifting his cup)

But now, somewhere in their minds, the question sits.

And sometimes, a question is a seed.

[Lights dim. Jazz swells to fill the space.

The candle flickers one last time before going out.

Curtain.]

The Café of Unasked Questions

For Liberal Change-Makers, Academics & Funders

1. On Power & Patronage

- Which people or institutions would you *never* publicly challenge — and why?
- Whose money or approval are you quietly protecting, even when it limits what you say or do?
- If you lost your largest donor or employer tomorrow, would your public positions change?

2. On Systems vs. Symptoms

- How much of your work aims at reforming a system that is inherently destructive — rather than replacing it?
- Which root causes of collapse are you avoiding because they implicate your own way of life?
- What is the biggest systemic change you *believe in privately* but won't say aloud?

3. On Narrative Control

- Who defines the boundaries of “acceptable” discourse in your circles?
- When was the last time you risked being uninvited — and did it change anything?
- What topics or truths are always deferred to “later,” and why?

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4. On Class & Comfort

- How do you reconcile calling for justice while enjoying privileges created by the same extractive systems?
- In the spaces you lead, who is missing — and what have you *really* done to bring them in?
- What would you be willing to give up personally to achieve the world you describe in your mission?

5. On Failure & Accountability

- What has your organization *actually* changed at the systemic level in the last decade?
- If you measure success by grants received or events held, what is your measure for failure?
- Who in your field has faced no accountability despite obvious failure — and why is that tolerated?

6. On the Future You're Building

- If your strategies succeed exactly as planned, will they produce a sustainable, just, and livable civilization — or just a gentler version of the current one?
- What kind of world will the children of 2125 inherit if your current plans remain the same?
- What single change could you make tomorrow that would shift your work from incrementalism to transformation?



Wisocracy

Wisocracy World Café

Wisocracy Theater Universe

Wisocracy World News

Wisocracy is a solidarity-gift economy-based organization.
We are dedicated to advancing human wisdom, wise democracy,
wise economy, and wise relations with each other,
and the rest of nature.

We focus on

Inner Transformation 🦉 Relational Healing 🌳 Systemic Redesign
Wise Leadership ⚖️ Wise Governance

We provide the Wisocracy World News free to all.
If you find our articles help you deepen your understanding of life,
we welcome and appreciate your membership and support.

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