Table Talk: Questions to Think and Talk About…

1) Authoritarian worldviews and responses may have negative consequences for society and the world. But what benefits might they have for the person who holds them?

2) Research has revealed differences between conservatives and liberals on a variety of physiological measures. Conservatives are more attuned to threatening visual stimuli than liberals. Also, certain structures of the brain differ in size or the amount of activation. (For example, conservatives have larger right amygdalas than liberals.) How convinced are you that we are, as one headline declared, “Born to Party”?

3) Are left-wing as well a right-wing forms of populism gaining ground in the US and in other western societies? What are the main differences between right-wing and left-wing populism? For example, is it possible to be a left-wing ideologue who exhibits a similar rigid, dogmatic, cognitive style as the right-wing authoritarian personality? In other words, is there such a thing as “authoritarianism of the left”?

4) What are the factors that have made right-wing populism increasingly appealing in recent decades in so many western societies?

5) What could be some plausible responses to the rise of right-wing populism? Would you rather see the political system and society at large appeasing the populist forces or opposing them in an uncompromising way?