

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Harvey Mansfield, Harvard University

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KRISTOL: I'm Bill Kristol. Our guest today is Harvey Mansfield, longtime professor of political philosophy at Harvard and my teacher. I'm thrilled to have you with us today.

I: Political Science and Political Philosophy (0:015 – 16:37)

KRISTOL: Harvey, why political philosophy? You've been teaching it for 50 years but I think you started off intending to be a political scientist.

MANSFIELD: Well, that's true. I went from political science to political philosophy at Harvard. As you mentioned, I went to Harvard and I went to Harvard in a more significant way than most people because I never left Harvard.

Well, the jokes about Harvard are about what happens to you after you leave Harvard. For example, you'll never regret going to Harvard. Others may, but you won't. So, I learned it there because I've always been there.

And I started with this wonderful teacher, Sam Beer, who was a professor of comparative government, and we studied, especially, political parties and that was political science, which had a certain relationship to what was called political theory. And they felt that – Sam Beer and others like him – that political science needed theoretical background or backing up or a foundation underneath it.

And the foundation he went to, others too at that time, was Max Weber. So, when I was an undergraduate as a senior, I wrote a senior these on political parties and Max Weber as backing up. But while I was doing so I began to wonder. I was even turning to Hegel at the same time that I was reading Max Weber, and I concluded that political science was not enough by itself it doesn't judge. When you study facts, facts ask to be judged. A fact presents itself as something, which is either good or bad or – and people who deal with facts either deserve to be praised or blamed.

It doesn't seem to be possible to stop and say, "I'm not going to be concerned with evaluation." Political philosophy is concerned with evaluation because political facts aren't sufficient by themselves and they ask to be judged.

KRISTOL: And you came to this view on your own? Influenced by other teachers?

MANSFIELD: Not exactly. Certainly not –

KRISTOL: Not happy with Weber?

MANSFIELD: A little bit of all that, but I especially came under the influence of Leo Strauss, the famous – more than famous philosopher at the University of Chicago, where I did not go, but heard about and learned from through his students, especially Harry Jaffa at Ohio State, and a couple of them attended Harvard, Richard Cox and David Lowenthal, were good friends of mine.

And Leo Strauss, I think, presented political philosophy in a more much attractive way and profound way than I had ever seen before. It went beyond just theory in the sense of generalizing. It looked toward the most fundamental premises and connected those to the most obvious and superficial facts.

So it was empirical beginning from the surface of things in a way that I had never appreciated before. So I read Leo Strauss' book, *Natural Right and History*, about the time that I graduated – that book came out in 1953. And I was completely – completely overthrown in all my previous thoughts and had to sit down and revise and think again.

KRISTOL: This was after your senior thesis, so you didn't have to revise your senior thesis?

MANSFIELD: No, no, I now leave it on my shelf never to be looked at again. But it's not worth the paper that it's written on. But maybe the experience was worth it. And after that I went into the Army. I had plenty of time to think. Those were two years I spent away from Harvard.

KRISTOL: With time to read?

MANSFIELD: With time to read, yes. Because I was not in a very – I was not in an emergency situation.

KRISTOL: Where were you?

MANSFIELD: I spent my time in Williamsburg, Virginia, and in Orleans, France, what the Army calls good duty.

KRISTOL: Yes, absolutely. And you came back to graduate school and at that point you were determined to study political philosophy. And you turned to Burke, I guess?

MANSFIELD: Edmund Burke.

KRISTOL: That was the subject of your Ph.D. thesis.

MANSFIELD: It was.

KRISTOL: So why Burke?

MANSFIELD: Well, Burke wrote on parties. I wanted to judge parties, and other people had studied the facts about parties and generalizations about parties. But they hadn't defended parties.

And, in fact, before Burke, a party was always thought to be a faction. It was thought to be a bad thing for a republic to suffer from party divisions. Because it meant that the common good was not understood. It was disputed and this wasn't good.

Burke changed that with a small writing of his called *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* that came out in 1770. And so I made a study of that in my dissertation which I called *Party Government and Statesmanship*. Then when it came out as a book, switched it around, which changed everything from – to *Statesmanship and Party Government*.

KRISTOL: That was your decision or your publisher?

MANSFIELD: No, it was my decision. It was a fundamental rethinking. And statesmanship is understanding things on the spot individually and a wise man making the wisest decision in those circumstances. And party government deal with politics as it can more usually be found, which is disputes, not being sure what the wisest decision is or even what the wisest person is.

And Burke who was certainly a wise man and who made many wise decisions, nonetheless supported a way of carrying on politics through party government, which legitimized, regularized, made permanent divisions – party divisions that before him were always thought to be temporary or hoped to be temporary.

KRISTOL: So the paradox, I guess, is a statesman defending party government?

MANSFIELD: That's just what – that's what he did, yeah.

KRISTOL: So, why not give full rein to statesmanship? Why confine things into these parties, which are then partisan and partial and all that?

MANSFIELD: And based on principle – that was Burke's notion that a party was a group of men gathered together based on some – acting together on the basis of some principle. And you might criticize that from the standpoint of statesmanship as – by saying that, you know, principles are generalizations that don't always work. You can't always practice your principles because events come, emergencies arise, which prevent you from doing that.

So, principles are always a problem, and I think Burke agreed with that, but he thought that it was better to have principle than a series of wise decisions, each of them defensible on its own, but perhaps not coherent altogether.

Because most wise men can't – don't have the power to act on the basis of their wisdom. They have to persuade other people who are not so wise. And one way of doing this is to take what is wisdom and try to transform it into principles.

So, for example, we have wisdom, what is wise for America to do, but we also have a principle, which is the right of consent and sometimes the right of consent gets you into trouble, it's very inconvenient, but still on the whole we stick to that principle even though it doesn't always bring wisdom, at least not immediately.

So, that would be an example of the way in which parties based on principle are wiser than wisdom not based on principle.

KRISTOL: I think your argument was that Burke really founded party government – I mean consciously, it wasn't just something that grew up accidentally as democracy emerged or whatever?

MANSFIELD: No, that's right. It didn't just emerge from politics or political science, it was something that – he saw what was going on politically, which was the king choosing people on the basis of his own, quote, wisdom, unquote, or his own right as king to choose his ministers.

And he would choose according to – or at least he was offered the choice of choosing according to merit. And Burke thought that merit wasn't always the best thing. You need to have merit, but also a certain amount of loyalty and a certain amount of refinement.

And, so he defended a government that – a free government which was mainly run by gentlemen. But it was possible for gentlemen not always to agree and to have different principles so it could be respectable to have party differences among respectable people. And that's today what we have.

It's not that the party dispute is between the nobles, the respectable people and the plebes, the ignorant

mob, but we have two parties, both of which are equally respectable.

KRISTOL: So that's party government?

MANSFIELD: Yeah.

KRISTOL: You came to political philosophy really, from, the study of politics. I mean, I think that's not always been the case. A lot political philosophy professors or some – interested at a young age or whatever and the thinkers themselves, are charmed by the thinkers and –

MANSFIELD: And by theories and especially by the theory behind democracy. They think that what democracy means is theories which promote democracy, and that's what most political theory is, I'm sorry to say, in our profession these days. "Democratic theory." But maybe even democracy needs to be made respectable or needs to be thought out a little bit more than they do.

Democracy might have weaknesses, which would show up against an understanding of politics which took wisdom or statesmanship more seriously. And so democracy needs to address its weaknesses and not just to promote its theory and, say, in the case of democracy, which is about equality, to try to make all human life as equal as possible.

KRISTOL: I can see why you became so interested in Tocqueville. Maybe we should jump to that since we're talking about democracy and its weakness? But had you always – I'm just curious – a bit of a skeptic about a sort of excessive glorification of democracy? Were you a sort of slightly conservative with a little "c" even as –

MANSFIELD: Well, politically, yeah, I was liberal. My parents were New Deal liberals. My father was a political scientist – same name as mine – gave me his name, thank you. That was what I had at home and, of course, growing up among professors as I did – a university brat – that's what I heard.

But yes, I began to develop doubts and finally changed to becoming conservative after I graduated from college, and coincidentally was reading Leo Strauss' book. But since Strauss doesn't really promote conservatism – I think with a view from above conservatism that is generally favorable to conservatism.

So, that's a viewpoint of wisdom – kind of pretentious, maybe, to speak of wisdom, but it's a kind of pretension that opens up new ways of looking at things and – so to suppose, say, that conservative is always correct and that liberalism has nothing to say, that would go against what I was thinking about party government but also against what I think is true.

So I became a conservative mostly on the anti-Communist issue. And then turned to sort of more domestic –

KRISTOL: In the 60s did you react against the 60s as so many people did?

MANSFIELD: Yes, did I ever. Yes, well, that made me much more conservative in every respect, especially so-called social conservatism, because the 60s – the 60s was not so much of an attack – not so much of an attack on conservatives. It was an attack on liberals. The liberals that I had known and worked with, people like Sam Beer.

He recognized this and also defended Harvard as well as he could from invasions of the New Left. But you know, that – so that was a difficult time for us and what it – what happened was that the liberals that I knew always had underneath a certain conservatism that they took for granted and weren't fully aware of. This was only – also true even of my own dad.

So, the late 60s brought that out a little bit, and this is one reason why the late 60s not only gave birth to the New Left but also to conservatism.

KRISTOL: I remember in your book, the *Spirit of Liberalism*, which came out in the late 70s, was an

analysis of various liberals who were unwilling to fight for liberalism really and the weakness – showed the weakness of contemporary liberalism.

MANSFIELD: That's right. They were lacking in manliness. This was – this is another theme –

KRISTOL: To get to another one of your themes.

MANSFIELD: Another one of my themes. Yeah.

KRISTOL: I don't know which one to go to next, universally – possibilities –

II: Tocqueville, Political Philosopher (16:35 – 27:00)

MANSFIELD: Maybe we should go to Tocqueville?

KRISTOL: Let's do that. So, how did you – you're famous for your work on Burke, your work on Machiavelli, you taught the history of political philosophy at Harvard. I took that class, Plato to Nietzsche. I think Tocqueville is – I think someone would look and say – be surprised that you spent so much time translating Tocqueville and writing about Tocqueville at considerable length. Why Tocqueville? Is he a political philosopher and not just kind of a sociologist who observed America?

MANSFIELD: Yes, I think he is a political philosopher. He's a political philosopher at a time when he thought that philosophy was doing damage politically and socially. That philosophy was more hurtful to democracy than helpful and this was because philosophy was mainly materialist philosophy.

He was a great opponent of materialism, mostly on political grounds – Tocqueville – he thought that one of the weaknesses of democracy – I spoke earlier of weaknesses and this – one of them is the taste for material wealth that most people who are democrats – they're democrats because they don't believe anyone else is superior to them.

So this – they don't have any authority that they look up to. So they look to themselves. But there's nothing there. So they look around and they see what everybody else is doing. They become conformists. But they also become – they endow themselves with a need for some immediate pleasures that – because the ones off in the long term, they don't see or don't appreciate – it seems that you need to have some kind of authority or believe in some higher power, religion, God, or so – or the good to gear yourself towards what is in the future as opposed to right here.

“Right here” means materialism, and material pleasures because those are immediate, everybody can feel them, they're very democratic. But they hurt democracy, and it's partly because they make us into people of no interest and no ambition, with nothing on their minds except more and more of what they already have, which they don't appreciate, because they don't take time to enjoy. And they don't do that because they don't know what they would do with that time to enjoy. They have no sense of leisure.

So, this is the taste for material pleasures, which does so much harm and which will – it's bad for democracy because it makes them unwilling to defend democracy. They don't have the same kind of spiritedness and the martial temper needed at crucial times and they don't have the desire or interest in greatness, which is what dignifies man according to Tocqueville.

KRISTOL: But Tocqueville doesn't present this argument directly? He doesn't lecture, democracy –

MANSFIELD: That's right.

KRISTOL: He does it in the course of describing America –

MANSFIELD: Yes, that's a good example of political science that is sort of brimming with potential political philosophy. And he left it at that because philosophy had been taken over by materialist philosophy. And, so to appeal to his audience as being interested in philosophy wouldn't have worked –

have been successful. They would have seen it as undemocratic and condescending.

And, so he shows – and – but I think this was still a philosophical decision on his part and based on his philosophical interest in the whole. He, throughout his book – his great book, *Democracy in America* – contrasts democracy with aristocracy and he became much more aware of what democracy is when you see it in contrast to what it isn't and in which he supposes more or less – more or less factually to have been the case in the times before democracy in the Middle Ages or the ancients or – and aristocracy had its great defects too, but still it had its concern for greatness and this is what you see in – if you can make that comparison.

And what you don't see, if you're merely a democrat looking at everything democratically and not understanding that there is this whole other half to human nature and human experience.

KRISTOL: He presents that other half as sort of not practical in the modern world; you can't be an aristocrat. It always seems to be part of the charm of studying political philosophy, when I took it with you, is that you are exposed to these alternatives that are politically incorrect, to say the least, and challenging and eye-opening, whether it's Plato or Nietzsche or whatever. And Tocqueville seems to, in this respect, cut a little bit against that – the charm, awakening character of political philosophy by saying well, we're all living in a democratic horizon. I mean, you think that's –

MANSFIELD: Yes, you would have to –

KRISTOL: – reasonable decision of him to make?

MANSFIELD: Yes, right. That is a good criticism of Tocqueville that yes, you wouldn't go into philosophy after you read him. But if you read him really carefully as a philosopher would or somebody who's interested in philosophy would, you would see that he does mention names like Pascal –

KRISTOL: Socrates.

MANSFIELD: Socrates, Plato, yes. He criticizes them. But you might wonder can it really be as ignorant as Tocqueville seems to say, no? And you look it up.

And you also see that – if you read his letters you saw that he was interested in philosophy and went through a period of sort of religious or anti-religious awakening as an adolescent. Read books of materialism, obviously reacting against them as much as in their favor.

But, yeah, philosophy is not a theme, but it's present. So, you do need to read other people besides Tocqueville. You need to read the other liberals that he was competing against. He was competing against Hobbes and Locke who were in their different ways promoted kinds of materialism.

But – and who did this on the basis of a notion that all of us begin equal at the beginning and this is a situation that they call the "state of nature." So, their liberalism was a kind of philosophical consequence – political consequence of this philosophical beginning, saying that human beings are all by themselves in a state of nature or as Hobbes said solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. So, they had these very bad beginnings and it's a pre-social, pre-political beginning.

But Tocqueville said, "No, you must begin with politics as it is and not as theorists imagine it to be." Still all the time you're reading *Democracy in America* if you become aware of Hobbes and Locke, you can see that Tocqueville is arguing against them and against their premises.

And is approaching, I would say, a kind of Aristotle for our time with this big difference that you point out; namely, that Aristotle always made you know that philosophy was the best way of life and the most superior knowledge. Whereas Tocqueville keeps that covered over.

KRISTOL: Why is that?

MANSFIELD: To be an Aristotelian these days you musn't refer directly to Aristotle.

KRISTOL: You think Aristotle might have approved of Tocqueville's approach?

MANSFIELD: He might have approved of that. He had his own master to deal with, namely, Plato. And he much more criticizes Plato than, I think, is necessary for him to do. And this too is perhaps a kind of stance on Aristotle's part to show that Plato had this failing – or maybe it isn't altogether a failing – of giving too low a view of politics. Politics deserves – there's a certain nobility to it, in fact, a terrific nobility to it.

And, so Aristotle wanted to bring to our attention the splendor of politics and of the moral virtue that people show in politics. And he thought that Plato had not done this sufficiently. And, so on every page, so to speak, there is a kind of critique of Plato and then Aristotle's *Ethics* – there's an, actually, statement of disagreement with his revered teacher, which he says that he loves his friend, but he loves the truth more, the most beautiful kind of criticism you could give or get.

III: Back to the Ancients (27:00 – 34:55)

KRISTOL: You've gone from Tocqueville to Aristotle, and I guess people would say that's characteristic of your own thought and students of Leo Strauss who always want to go back to the classics, to the ancients. Why the ancients, why these 2,000-plus-year-old thinkers, why are they so important to understanding our situation and politics in general? I mean, you say Burke and Tocqueville seem pretty impressive, why do we have to go back to Aristotle?

MANSFIELD: Well, I think we do. That is certainly characteristic of any follower of Strauss as I am. So – because what Strauss mainly did, at least in his more political work was to reintroduce the relevance and importance of the ancients.

Let's go back to political science, political science which doesn't judge, which thinks that you can state the facts without judging them. And –

KRISTOL: The famous fact-value distinction?

MANSFIELD: That is really modern political science, because it comes out of modern political philosophy. Modern political philosophy tried to begin with a set of facts, something like the state of nature, would be part of it, from which everything flows and on which everything can be built.

But to do that or to make that suggestion, or really assertion, the moderns had to oppose the ancients. And the ancients – And, so if you look at Hobbes and Locke, you see that their constant enemy is partly Christianity and the Church, but it's – even so when they opposed religion, it was because religion was based on Plato and Aristotle or make use of Plato and Aristotle because Plato and Aristotle showed the importance of the invisible, you could say.

The fact are what you can see or, perhaps, even what you can touch. Facts are in a way unintelligible. They are meant to be things that are understood as things, which are in your way. It isn't what you wish. But the fact is, that's why we use the word fact.

But Plato and Aristotle thought that knowledge was not really fact, but knowledge was what was intelligible in a fact. So I give this example from my father's time at Ohio State – or he was on the faculty at Ohio State and they used to have a joke that made the rounds of a faculty there, which went like this, "Question: How many students are there at Ohio State? Answer: About one in a 100."

So – in other words the fact that there are 40-50,000 students who are students there because the registrar says they are isn't really a fact if you want to get serious about what a student is.

So, if you want to get serious about human nature, you wouldn't just be concerned with the imagined facts that we would all be at each other's throats. But you would be looking at –

KRISTOL: Which is the state of nature?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, state of nature. You would be looking at human nature and greater complexity and the fact that we have a nobility as – an ability to rise above our situation, to rise above the facts in that brute and stubborn sense of the word. And that, I think, is what Plato and Aristotle have in common and what they try to show and what they try to base their politics on.

What is aspirational? Nowadays people speak of what is aspirational, what we want or what we would love to have, the future that lies before us, we hope. The things that we hope and change – we change because we hope for something better. But modern political science doesn't have any understanding really of what it is – what the things are that we would aspire to. And it doesn't have any way of judging among them.

KRISTOL: Presumably Plato and Aristotle would give guidance to what we should aspire to and not just – not just be for aspirations generally?

MANSFIELD: That's right, they do say – using Tocqueville's distinction, what is democratic about us. What we share with all other human beings, or at least all other citizens in our country, as opposed to what is the reserve of a few, which the rest of us don't quite have but, perhaps, can understand and even admire.

KRISTOL: So, that's the one in a 100 students as opposed to the 50,000 students? The real student is the one in 100.

MANSFIELD: That's right. That's right. The real student – and that's the –

KRISTOL: From an Aristotelian point of view –

MANSFIELD: That's right from Aristotle's point of view, and that's the real fact of what a student is, rendering questionable the whole modern reliance on facts as brute or stubborn and unintelligible. No, it isn't unintelligible. Think about it and then – so Socrates always asked this question, "What is?"

When you ask, "What is something?" you're looking for a permanent answer, not just "What is this pencil, and what is that and what is another?" but what is it that makes you call a pencil a pencil. I don't know why I chose that, but I did and now I'm stuck with it. And, so –

KRISTOL: Choose something else –

KRISTOL: Dog or something.

MANSFIELD: We can choose some kind of moral quality like justice. So, what is justice – is it American justice or Iranian justice or Communist justice? So there are all these different ways in which it appears, and nowadays the political scientist as such throws up his hand, not in despair, because he thinks that he has something interesting to say even if he doesn't know that, though he doesn't.

And, yes, so what is justice in itself? That is – what is it that makes it intelligible to call all these kinds of justice *justice*? So, maybe those kinds of justice, which you see, aren't as complete or perfect as the justice, which you can imagine or define in words?

So, that's what I mean by the recovery of the invisible standing behind the visible and necessary to it. It is a kind of formal – maybe a useful way of understanding the difference between the ancients and the moderns or, at least, between the Socratic ancients, those – like Plato and Aristotle, those that come out of Socrates. There were others, Epicureans and so on who were different. Because the ancients had their differences, too.

But still the Socratic ancients versus the moderns who begin from what is visible and they're never able to escape that.

IV: Machiavelli, Teacher of Evil (34:55 – 42:20)

KRISTOL: But despite being influenced by Strauss and when you had sort of done Burke, you didn't, at least visibly, go back to the ancients, I mean, you taught them certainly and were influenced – studied them – wrote some on Aristotle, I think, back in the late 60s early 70s, but your big work was on Machiavelli, who didn't actually – wasn't a big fan of those imaginary republics of the ancients. Is that right, so why –

MANSFIELD: Yeah well, maybe having learned this main point I wanted to see how it applied to us, a certain division of labor. There were other people who were better at Greek than I was or still am – or am – and so – but –

KRISTOL: You also liked to study Machiavelli?

MANSFIELD: I liked studying Machiavelli.

KRISTOL: And still do?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, I still like – yeah – I have a certain fascination in his comedy and in his wonderful sarcastic puncturing of human pretentiousness.

KRISTOL: Your years of immersion in Machiavelli and careful commentaries and translations didn't persuade you to quite be a Machiavellian?

MANSFIELD: No, yeah – that's right. That's right. I'm still a partisan of the imaginary republic. Machiavelli spoke of things as they are and he used the phrase "the effectual truth." You know, you musn't be concerned with profession of good. People who think they're good, professing good and saying why they're good and other people are bad.

Because if you try to be good among people who aren't good, you'll come to ruin. That's a simple conclusion which – or declaration, which he makes available to you in the 15th chapter of *The Prince*. And, so you must avoid professions of good.

An example of a profession of good is working out what would be good in all cases. So, if you were a political person, you would want to work out the best regime. And this best regime would be in your imagination and he called that an imaginary republic, the best example of which is Plato's *Republic*, which is, indeed, imaginary because it doesn't exist.

So that would get you into trouble. The imaginary kingdom, too, you could also think of. That would be St. Augustine's *City of God*. Now to follow these imaginary possibilities will make you come to ruin, and therefore, you must look for the effectual truth; that is, the truth as it comes out.

And as it comes out, people who profess to be good often aren't good or maybe not often. Maybe they're usually good or even always good, but when the crucial situation comes on which everything depends – say, they will tell a lie or betray a friend or commit a crime or do something dishonest – and Machiavelli says, "You would, too." So, that's what I mean by fascinating.

KRISTOL: And wonderful to read. I think you seem to enjoy interpreting the texts, the stories, and contradictions and all of that.

MANSFIELD: Yes, yes, yes. All these things, which we were taught by Leo Strauss' famous book, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, my favorite book of his. Yeah.

But the deliberate contradictions of Machiavelli – sometimes, he'll say one thing and then the opposite thing. And sometimes, he'll lie to you and say there's a rule that never fails, that always means when you read that it fails, and you must look for where it fails.

So – and as you read Machiavelli you come to a difference between the things that he’s advising most people and the things that he is experiencing for himself. He’s advising most people to use these Machiavellian tricks to get ahead. These are essentially dirty tricks. And if there were a Machiavellian school of public administration, it would be called the Machiavelli school of scheming evil.

KRISTOL: It would be a good school.

MANSFIELD: Yeah, it would be a good school and much more interesting than certain other schools we could name.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: So, scheming evil – and this is his advice. But he who gives the advice is somehow above the advice and he doesn’t always follow it for himself. For himself, he tries to do good to mankind. He tries to enliven us and to give us something to shoot for, target for our ambition, glory. And a kind of glory, too, that will bring security for most people. And this as against the deprivations of corruption of the Church of his time.

So, his advice to a prince is always anticipate the other fellow and get there ahead of him. And if you think he’s going to kill you, make sure you kill him first. That’s anticipation. What that means is that all politics will be a kind of fight. And what Machiavelli is doing by advising this and by – therefore by standing above it – is to say he doesn’t really care who wins.

So, he’s not fundamentally, I think, an Italian patriot or even a Florentine patriot, and though, you know, he loved Italy and he loved his city, still the reasoning that he gives is – could very well result in the demise of both.

And, so – but he thinks that it will be good for mankind to have a great supply or greater display of virtue and that this will come about by following his advice. Therefore, he’s a kind of master conspirator, advising everybody else to conspire against each other. But he himself sort of uses their counteraction for and which is above them and that’s for the general improvement of mankind. So, mankind gets better by learning how to be more successfully evil.

V: Translating and Teaching (42:20 – 56:42)

KRISTOL: He certainly gets stronger, and you’ve not only interpreted Machiavelli, but you’ve translated him. Not just *The Prince* but much longer works of Machiavelli – *The Florentine Histories* and *The Discourses*. Right? And you’ve also translated Tocqueville. People might think that’s a little unusual to spend all that time translating texts. Do you learn –

MANSFIELD: Well, as a teacher you find out just how bad the translations are. They are so un-literal, they depart so far from the original that when teaching them I found I had to inform the students of mistranslations that they were dealing with. And, so that was one point.

Another point is that when you translate something you become very closely acquainted with the text in a way that otherwise you don’t. You sort of adopt it; it becomes yours. Machiavelli is your Machiavelli, because you see how much he is so often misinterpreted or what is often so easily forgotten about him. And, so it’s a way of learning as well as a way of teaching.

So, when I went into translating Machiavelli it was accidentally through a proposal of a friend of mine, Edward Banfield. His wife is Italian, and his wife had been looking for something to translate, and he said, “Well, my wife would like to translate Machiavelli.” I said, “Well, let’s do *The Florentine Histories*.” That’s Machiavelli’s longest work, and it’s about parties. That interested me for sure.

And, so we worked our way through that and handed it in to my publisher, University of Chicago Press and they said, “Well, thanks, but this is – we don’t think it will sell.” And, so – and I thought what will sell is *The Prince* – much shorter. So, I did that by myself, and by the time I finished – well, I did that by

myself in order to get the other – the first one published.

By the time I finished, I was enthusiastic and then turned to doing the *Discourses on Livy*, which is also a long work, and which I did with my friend and former student, Nathan Tarcov at Chicago, very much enjoying the collaboration with him.

And then later on I had a collaboration with my late wife, Delba Winthrop, in translating Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. That was an interesting experience. Because it was man and wife, and we were both worried that it might become a little bit acerbic on occasion if we disagreed. And, so we –

KRISTOL: But knowing Delba, she just yielded to you without any objection, I'm sure?

MANSFIELD: That's right. You've got her nature exactly right.

So, we worked independently and we would write each other notes and in order to reduce to a minimum the actual face time of arguing. That was – that's been my translation. I think it was Cervantes who said that translating a text is like putting on a coat inside out. That you – there are all these threads hanging down.

So, it's something which is in its nature imperfect. This goes against – a little bit against what I was saying before that all the translations were – I was blaming them for being imperfect. But – so the ideal of translation would be a one to one correspondence in Italian and in English or in French and in English – is not possible.

KRISTOL: One to one correspondence of key terms or all terms, I suppose?

MANSFIELD: So that's not really possible. You're dealing in the realm of imperfection, but there's such a thing as perfecting imperfection. That's a very modern –

KRISTOL: You would still tell students to read the original, of course.

MANSFIELD: Yes, of course.

KRISTOL: Serious students would learn the relevant languages, which they still do.

MANSFIELD: That's still necessary. I think I said once at the end of my introduction to the translation of *The Prince*, I said, "If you don't like this translation, try your own. If you do like it, learn to read Italian." So, that's translating.

It also – translating is also a tribute to the greatness of the great books. I don't agree with many philosophers – so-called philosophers – that is, people in philosophy departments today who put on the same level a philosophy professor of our time and – John Locke or Plato or Aristotle. As if these were all, you know, on the level of themselves. That's a kind of dragging down of the great to the not-so-great.

KRISTOL: You teach a famous course at Harvard. When I took it, it was called Government 106A and 106B, and then there was course number inflation, and so now it's Government what – 1060 – 1061 – ancients and then modern – ancients, medievals, and moderns. And how – I'm just curious over the years. Some you've grown more fond of, some you've decided to be less – who do you look forward to teaching again or rereading –

MANSFIELD: Oh, you mean the great thinkers that I treat in that course. By the way, that's a department course and it isn't my private property.

KRISTOL: That's fair. You only teach it every other year.

MANSFIELD: Actually, it's the oldest course in our department. It began with Charles McIlwain at the beginning of the 20th century, and it has a kind of history to it. And, so, I've taught it every other year and

my friends, the liberals, take over when I'm not there.

KRISTOL: And they still teach similar –

MANSFIELD: They teach it similarly. So, it's still the same course really. Well – so they have different choices from mine. They do John Stuart Mill now. I don't. I've never regretted that. But I don't know – I spend most of the time on Machiavelli because he begins it all, modern political philosophy. This is, the modern part; that's in the spring term.

And then Hobbes and then I spend less time on the rest who are again – they're followers –

KRISTOL: So, you really do believe that argument, that Machiavelli founded modern thought or even modernity –

MANSFIELD: Founder of modernity, yes, I do.

KRISTOL: Most of it is somehow there in Machiavelli and –

MANSFIELD: I think that's right. Modernity. What is that? Novelty. The love of novelty and the promotion of novelty. The notion that nothing is stable, that you're – always have to look for what's coming next. Hence the authority of today. Today, we believe this. That's always in contrast to yesterday – we believe something else, which was inferior to today. There's a notion of progress there.

The new is good because it brings better, and it's also an – goes against the notion of permanence or knowledge as permanent knowledge. Knowledge of the eternal. Science consists of the current findings of scientists. And so science becomes more and more a kind of congregation of scientists. It's the agreement of, say, climate scientists as to what's happening with our climate, is it warming or not?

And it isn't the discovery of the intelligible things, which are only intelligible because they are permanent and never changed. So, all this, I think, is modernity and you can put it under the word – the three-letter word, *new*, and that comes from Machiavelli. The new prince is the essential prince and then a republic must – can only survive by always doing new things, expanding and reordering itself. Those are the foreign policy imperative and the domestic policy imperative. So, newness.

KRISTOL: So Machiavelli only – though, apparently, only primarily about politics – is about more than politics?

MANSFIELD: That's right. And not about science. Because he doesn't mention modern science. Galileo comes later and so on, but still, I think, he has the basic premises of scientific knowledge, I've just tried to explain. He thinks that what is permanent is – especially about human beings – is always impermanent. That's a kind of paradox, but let him explain that.

KRISTOL: Of the ancients, who do you look forward to most revisiting each two years – every two years, Plato, Aristotle?

MANSFIELD: Plato has this wonderful attractiveness. Everything is so present, so immediate. Philosophy is something you can do right now. And it's concerned with what is the good life, what you should do with your life? This is always very attractive to me, as to students who are in a period of four years while they're at Harvard or wherever, in which they are sort of – just become free of their parents and about – before they take on the burdens and the obligations of careers and marriage and so on.

So, they're in this wonderful four-year period in which they're able to think independently and freely, and Plato is – can't be improved on for that. Aristotle, however, I like for his wisdom and for his sensibleness, his concern with and his interpretation of common sense. How he takes the things that we know and shows how valuable they are.

We're not simply ignorant. Plato – you read Plato and you say, ah, I know nothing. You read Aristotle –

oh – I actually know quite a – a good deal, you know. So, they're different in that way and they give you these alternative sensations of feeling inferior and full of wonder and feeling quite satisfied and full of wisdom.

KRISTOL: But maybe they don't – not fundamentally different?

MANSFIELD: Not fundamentally different, no. Not fundamentally different but different ways of presenting the same thing. Whether you want to present philosophy as something inquisitive, inquiring, as a way of life or whether you want to present philosophy as – as the crown of our knowledge and what provides all of our premises and foundations.

So, Plato you could say invented dialectic philosophy, and Aristotle invented all these sciences – ethics, politics, economics, physics, metaphysics. These are all sciences that he invented.

KRISTOL: And the students – you mentioned them – you've been teaching them for over 50 years?

MANSFIELD: Over 50 years.

KRISTOL: Fundamentally changed or not?

MANSFIELD: I would say not.

KRISTOL: Is that right? Despite everything?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, despite everything. Despite all the changes and composition and the – you know, the political changes, even under political correctness – the students – there may be fewer of them but they're just as good and just as interested and just as valuable.

KRISTOL: And political correctness is bad because it stifles thought, or good because it's so ridiculous that the intelligent students rebel against it?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, well a friend of mine says that political correctness is a great gift for comedians. And you see that on TV, *South Park* for example, and elsewhere. But it is a real devil in the universities, because it really does stifle inventive questioning and gives you a false sense of complacent superiority, which is in a profound way absolutely disgusting to behold.

VI: What is Manliness? (56:42 – 1:16:34)

KRISTOL: So, about seven years ago in 2006, you published a book, *Manliness*, that you surely knew would cause a ruckus and be denounced, and why the book, why the topic?

MANSFIELD: Manliness I define as taking charge in a risky situation. There's more to it than that, but I think there are some people who are good at that and who reach out for it and whose lives would not be complete without doing it and others who don't fear it and rather seek security than risk. So, facing risk in a risky situation.

And I – what I wrote was a modest defense of manliness. And the emphasis on modest because manliness can be bad as well as good. Not everyone who takes risks deserves to have them turn out right and so manliness is, I think, responsible for a lot of evil. You can say that terrorist are manly, they're willing to risk their lives and give their lives for a principle they believe in or a point they believe in.

And – but on the other hand, the only way that terrorist can be dealt with is through the manliness of non-terrorists or people who are against terrorism like the Navy SEALs who killed Osama bin Laden. So – in other words, manliness has to be the cure for the evils of manliness. And there is something inevitable about it. There are people who are that way, and there's no getting around that.

So, either you give them some useful employment and arrange society so that they have something to be

manly about or you leave it unemployed, which I fear is the situation often today and their manliness looks to outlets, which are not for the common good.

So, in a way this connects to what I was saying about Machiavelli – Machiavelli thought that his time was characterized by what he called “ambitious idleness.” In other words, there are a lot of talented Italians or people elsewhere, too, who had no employment and whose talents were not used. Maybe it’s more than talent, it’s also their spirit, their spiritedness.

So, manliness is not always a virtue. It’s a kind of human quality, which can be made into a virtue. You can see it at a low level when it’s the manliness of a thug or a terrorist, which is simply gut courage, but it’s at a higher level when one wants to speak of a gentleman or a lady – we have to get to the sex difference – a gentleman or a lady who is refined and – you know, doesn’t seek to make a manly occasion out of everyday events in life, but has some control, some moderation.

And then to the highest instance of manliness, which is the manliness of a philosopher – the willingness to challenge accepted beliefs and I think that takes a lot of guts in the – but – in a kind of paradoxical sense. Because most manly men don’t think much about what it is they’re defending or the principle that they’re actually working for.

Principle is not something that’s at the forefront of their minds when they’re being manly. In fact, it’s almost an instinctive reaction. Only habitual at this – maybe at the level of a gentleman, but usually instinctual and not based on much thinking.

And manly men would assume that they have a place in the world and what their place is is to make a place for manliness. Because manliness is a defense of – or as being in charge of risk presupposes say an environment, an atmosphere, a universe, even, that is full of risk or that is chaotic.

So, the manly man takes it upon himself to take charge of this whole chaotic mess and to make sense of it. That will be a way in which one could philosophically understand manliness and the requirements of manliness.

KRISTOL: And, so your thought was not something that as a society we don’t value manliness enough, but we don’t understand it psychologically as part of human nature?

MANSFIELD: I think that’s right. Now feminism values manliness. It valued – because feminism wants women to take occupations once taken by men. Therefore, in combat, soldiers and politics, these are manly professions traditionally confined to men because they were felt to require the courage to face risk, and that women didn’t have this or didn’t have it to the same extent as men.

So, the feminism made a kind of manly attack on the manly premise that one sex had more of it than the other. And their – they asserted the equality of the sexes pretty much in everything that matters.

KRISTOL: You agree with that?

MANSFIELD: No. I don’t really. You can think of a few things – in fact, many important things in which the sexes are the same, but the differences remain, and it’s important to understand and appreciate those differences.

Women – Aristotle said that women find it easier to be moderate and men find it easier to be courageous, and I think that’s a good way to put it, because it shows that each sex has its virtue. And, so to say that women aren’t as manly as men still leaves them to be more womanly than men, and that’s a good thing.

KRISTOL: Leaves a few individual women to be manly and a few individual men to be moderate –

MANSFIELD: That’s right. Everybody knows that there are hard women and soft men, but that doesn’t, I think, challenge the distinction, which is never perfect or universal in questions of human action and human life. Our nature is never such that it completely takes us over and forces us, compels us to be the

way that we are.

We do have the ability to reflect and sometimes to resist our nature, and this is the basis of what you might call human nobility. That we are not satisfied simply with what we are given from nature, but we can rebel against it.

And, so a woman can rebel against her womanly nature as we see is happening, because human beings have this flexibility in their nature, and they – and it's also the case that a woman can rise to the occasion. I think of the movie *High Noon* at the end of which Grace Kelly – this beautiful Quaker lady – saves her man by shooting a man who was about to shoot him.

So, despite her reluctance or her disgust, really, she – and I think actually women are perhaps better at doing this than men are. Women are more versatile than men are. That's an advantage, you know. But men are more single-minded than women, which is also an advantage.

That's an example of the way I would think about the sex differences. So, when I wrote this book, I was attacked by the feminists because I was showing, they thought, which was correctly, that women aren't as good at doing the things that men do as men are.

But I was suggesting or, at least, leaving open many things, all of them, under, you can say, the umbrella of moderation of understanding reality and – better than men, and they didn't like this because if you admit that women are better than men in anything, it detracts from their argument that we're equal in everything.

So, they would rather accept that they are just as bad as men and have it equal than to claim any kind of superiority for themselves and this is the difference between the feminism of our time and of, say, the 19th century. In the 19th century, women claimed the right to vote, the suffragettes.

Why? Because if women voted our corrupt politics would be purified and cleansed. And, so there wouldn't be these men with their dirty motives and their selfishness and their corruption or they wouldn't be so powerful and our politics would be morally uplifted by the moral superiority of women.

But in our time, that's been all together sacrificed, and the feminists are even proud that if the statistics for women murderers goes up – as compared to men – goes up. And that – that shows that they're able to rise above the confines of the traditional patriarchal requirements.

KRISTOL: Since we're not going to go back to – I think you say this in the book – to traditional patriarchy, is it possible at a time that is so committed to equal rights and equal opportunity and sort of gender-blind admissions and job opportunities and treatment of people, which in a way I don't think you're even against – is it possible then to have an honest public discussion of something like manliness?

MANSFIELD: It's very rarely possible to have an honest public discussion of anything and – but especially of this – the way you've defined it, yes. I think it's correct. It certainly is.

KRISTOL: But you thought it was important to –

MANSFIELD: It was important to make the point. And I think feminism has changed in recent times or recent – most recent decades – I would say the last two – to greater recognition of sex differences. It's true that women want to be treated like women and they – but they also want to be treated not like women and they'll take whichever they think is best without fearing too much about consistency – fearing inconsistency – but still that's very human.

And they are admitting – I think women are admitting now that – beginning to come to grips with the fact that they aren't the same as men. Isn't there a way of being equal without being the same? And for that we need to go back to a patriarchal notion of – you might say, a refined or intelligent patriarchal notion that women have their virtues and that – it isn't that, say, women are emotional and men are intelligent or reasonable.

And that I think is quite wrong and foolish – but that we reason differently. It just isn't the case. This is the most important thing that men and women think the same. We have different outlooks. So, to have a different body somehow goes with having a different soul.

And, so for example, women are more pacifistic. Well, they have children, that's a big investment, nine months – nine months of your life for each one of them. You're not going to go throwing away human life recklessly.

Well, maybe that's comical, but I think that's – that kind of thinking is very common and even wise. There is a kind of wisdom in that correspondence of roles and ways of thinking.

KRISTOL: The appreciation for differences can be sustained in a liberal regime, which is so committed to equality and to some degree to public life or in law to not recognizing the differences. I guess the traditional conservative would say, "Well, you have to uphold these differences." The legal system somehow has to – this was the view until the 60s or 70s – the legal system has to uphold these differences to sustain them, really. And I guess the experiment we're now engaged in –

MANSFIELD: Is whether we can uphold the differences legally, but not in fact or not all together in fact.

KRISTOL: Uphold the differences in fact and not legally?

MANSFIELD: Yes.

KRISTOL: Uphold equality legally.

MANSFIELD: Equality legally, but –

KRISTOL: Sameness legally, I suppose.

MANSFIELD: So, women would have an equal opportunity to be CEO, but will they be satisfied with the fact, which turns out to be somewhat less than 50-50? Or women would legally be permitted to require their husbands to do half the work, but they would expect to be disappointed. Which this is, I think, a big point in the debate, who does the housework?

Because who does the housework is connected to who runs the household, and not too many women, I think, want to give up the management of the household. They want to be able to say when it's clean and when it isn't.

So, there was this funny episode on *Desperate Housewives* once where a couple was exchanging roles and one of them – the man was doing the housework and the woman was doing a career job. And she came home and the house was always dirty because her husband had a system.

Being a man, he decided there was a systematic way of doing it. So, if you clean one room each week and there were seven rooms, that would only take 10 or 15 minutes of each day and the trouble was, however, the house was always dirty.

So, the manly or the male way of doing it –

KRISTOL: Didn't work too well.

MANSFIELD: Yeah, doesn't work too well, so a woman looks at this and considers, "Maybe, this is something I don't want to let go of," and it's good to have a slave to do one third of the toughest and most menial jobs, carrying trash, and so on.

But for those that require science, like dealing with the children and cooking, I better do it myself.

KRISTOL: That's the woman speaking?

MANSFIELD: That's a woman speaking and, of course –

KRISTOL: – And you think this is possible? Is it just nostalgia for a long-ago time?

MANSFIELD: I'm putting my bet on the intelligence of women, ultimately, to see what is in their interest as opposed to what their principle seems to require of them.

KRISTOL: Let me ask actually a broader question following from that, which I said half in jest, usually it's something nostalgic, but it does seem to be you're writing about America in general and about political philosophy – it's not in the spirit of nostalgia or yearning for a day that could never come back, in this respect, it's more in the spirit of Tocqueville of looking at the current situation and figuring out what can and can't be done. Is that fair?

MANSFIELD: That is fair.

KRISTOL: Do you feel that that's the right approach to take?

MANSFIELD: Yes, again the way to begin taking that approach is to read Tocqueville, because he does just what you said. He takes things as they are and shows what they are as virtues and sometimes he exaggerates.

For example, he has chapters on women in *Democracy in America*, which give a very idyllic view of the harmony between the sexes in the 1830s when he came to America and it's probably not quite true and not meant to be – but you can often give advice in the form of praise.

If you praise someone who's very messy and say, "Oh my, how clean that suit is." You know, he might say, "Gee, it's not very clean. I wonder if he was telling me something." So, that's a nice way sometimes of – or praising a certain policy as having been taken when it hasn't actually been taken, but should have been.

So you can find virtue in the actual as a way of changing the actual, as a way of reform and not of nostalgia.

VII: Our Corrupt Universities (1:16:34 – 1:25:16)

KRISTOL: And you're not particularly, unlike so many conservatives, both in general in the last 10, 20, 30 years and in particular in the last few years – you're not wildly pessimistic about –

MANSFIELD: I'm not wildly pessimistic.

KRISTOL: – America, the university, the culture, all these things –

MANSFIELD: Yes, and I keep hoping and looking carefully for things that are worth hoping for. It's true I have greater hopes for America than for the universities. Can America do without its universities?

KRISTOL: Well, what about that? Let's talk about that. You've been such a critic of Harvard – your beloved Harvard and of higher education –

MANSFIELD: Yes, I do love Harvard, and it's very wayward, and it's made itself hard to love, as it goes along.

KRISTOL: Could the country do well without the universities that are in the state they're in or could somehow – could intellectual life flourish outside and around the universities?

MANSFIELD: Yes, I suppose so. I know I haven't really thought much about that.

KRISTOL: It did for centuries, I suppose.

MANSFIELD: I have tenure after all. So, it gives one a certain complacency and a certain vested interest in things as they are. Maybe, we could start to imagine an intellectual life without universities, salons for example. That would be something that women might like to take on.

KRISTOL: That's good.

MANSFIELD: Yeah back to the – that's not nostalgic but it's an old practice, which might have new advantages, new virtues. So, you know, so use your imagination and include the past in the possibilities of human improvement.

KRISTOL: Lots of the great thinkers we admire the most never went to university, and were tutored or read books or –

MANSFIELD: That's right.

KRISTOL: They were in, I guess, the French Enlightenment; the British set up the Royal Society and the *Encyclopédie*, and that was all to get around the universities of the day.

MANSFIELD: That's right.

KRISTOL: Maybe there are modern equivalents of that?

MANSFIELD: The universities were the invention of monks. So and somehow, they were taken over by people who opposed what Thomas Jefferson called “monkish superstition.”

KRISTOL: Right. Now, they're dominated by a different kind of unmonkish superstition.

MANSFIELD: That's right, atheistic superstition, you might say, or materialism, a spirit of materialism.

So – you know, it's – the universities are fully in contradiction with themselves. They regard themselves as the most rational or reasonable part of our society. But they themselves depend the least on reason. They attack reason.

If you go to the university psychology professor, he'll tell you that man is not a rational animal. The way to make him act is to nudge him or to appeal to his lower instincts in some way. We're not conscious – or unconscious is much stronger than our conscious.

So, they themselves are working against the facts of their own existence. And they represent themselves as intelligent while all the time attacking human intelligence. That doesn't make sense, and one hopes that students will become – will begin to see that contradiction one of these days.

KRISTOL: My sense is the students sort of realize they're not getting what they should be getting from colleges and universities, but it's one thing to realize that and to let a lot of it slough off one's back and another thing to figure out how to get education. That sounds so easy.

MANSFIELD: Yeah, at the end of it – even – you go to law school and you see how little that helps you become a good lawyer. And you say that but you don't, you know, really try to think how one might avoid that kind of experience.

So, you know – and again I haven't done that thinking myself but I encourage it and – somehow, we still need the institutions, which address the few, so – which address the best and – or which address the best in an isolated or – situation like a college where one can think and criticize and learn.

So, altogether to abolish universities and put it all on the line are all – just a kind of night school all day – all-day night school would not be a good idea. The trouble with online education that I've seen so far is that it's too universal, that it appeals to too much to the average –

KRISTOL: It needn't. I mean, it would depend what's put on. Couldn't you have a kind of Jeffersonian, you know? It's available to everyone but if it's done at a certain level – if you put the best calculus course online only the best math students – or advanced trigonometry – only the best students would benefit from that. So, it doesn't have to be –

MANSFIELD: That works better in mathematics, maybe, than in questions of politics and morals where you need to have some debate and some questioning exchanged, dialectic as Plato said.

KRISTOL: And that's harder to do online, not impossible maybe, but – of course, plenty of smart people have learned a lot reading books without having the advantage of taking a class with ten other kids, over the years, over the centuries.

MANSFIELD: All that is true. The really great intellects are self-taught, obviously, and one should always remember that. Tocqueville makes a remark about him, how democracy sets obstacles in the way of great minds.

What would Pascal have been if had had to get a Ph.D. and go to graduate school?

KRISTOL: Or Tocqueville himself, right?

MANSFIELD: Learn how to be deferent to senior professors.

KRISTOL: Not go to America at age – what was he 25? – to write this huge two-volume book because he hasn't – he has to pick a narrow thesis topic for his Ph.D. thesis. We're not all Tocqueville; that's a problem.

MANSFIELD: That is a problem, and so that's the answer the Ph.D. people will give. And therefore, you need some credential. We need professions, and professions are composed of experts, experts go to school. At the end of the school, they get a credential, so you're not an expert without a credential because somebody has to, you know, certify that you're an expert and that works in favor of universities. And universities work in favor of it, so – of professionalism, you might say, rather than true reflection or even true learning.

It's not so good for, I think, a politician to get the – get the education of a professional. Because a politician needs to be above the professions and to be able to question things that turn his mind, to pivot, as we say now.

You take up a stance and then you pivot. Because the threat is somewhere suddenly from your flank or the rear. So, professionals can't do that and they're taught not to do that. They're taught to use rules. So, our universities teach rules; that's maybe their great fault.

[END]

Additional Footage

Guest: Harvey Mansfield, Harvard University

Taped TBD, 2013

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I: Encountering Leo Strauss (0:00 – 17:50)

KRISTOL: In your first book, *Statesmanship and Party Government*, you thank your Harvard professors, your dissertation advisors, I guess, as you should, but you also thank Leo Strauss. How did you encounter him or his work since he was never at Harvard, I think?

MANSFIELD: That's right. He didn't have the highest opinion of Harvard.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

MANSFIELD: That's true.

KRISTOL: Shocking.

MANSFIELD: That was in 1965. By then, I was, for sure, a Straussian. I had some experience with other Straussians, before meeting Strauss and was eager to meet him, which happened only, I think, in the late 1950s when I was a graduate student, just about finishing.

I went to Chicago for a conference that Strauss' student Robert Goldwin was holding on some policy question, which I've forgotten. And Strauss came to this, and this was a great presence and the philosopher had come to a political conference. And, so I got to meet him then and that was a wonderful thing, an experience.

But I didn't really know him until I went to Berkeley as an assistant professor – this was my first job – in 1960. And there he was spending the year at the Center for Behavioral Studies of all things at Stanford in Palo Alto, and I was teaching at Berkeley in my first year. It's not easy to teach in your first year. It's sort of like skating and then trying to create the ice in front of you, so that you have something to skate on and you're thinking of your next step always as a first-year teacher, and you're not worried about where you're going and what the goal is, so I was occupied with that.

And Strauss had a reading group for his students, he brought along a couple with him. There was, maybe, eight or nine of us who came to his house in Palo Alto on Wednesday evening starting at 8. So that Wednesday was a difficult day for me. I had to teach a – I give a lecture in the morning and then teach my seminar, which was on Edmund Burke, of course, subject of my dissertation. Typical thing for a first-year teacher.

That ended at six, so at six I climbed in the car and drove an hour – hour and 20-30 minutes – to Palo Alto and arrived at 8 a little out of breath. And having munched on a sandwich while driving on the way, and then encountered Leo Strauss, and this was the most intense intellectual experience I had ever had. He was by far the smartest person I'd ever been in the presence of. And I was just overwhelmed. It took all my faculties to keep up with him.

KRISTOL: And what was the subject of the reading?

MANSFIELD: The subject of the reading group was a little bit of Plato, but mostly Aristophanes. This was 1960-61, which was the year that Strauss was writing his book on – which later came out as *Socrates and Aristophanes*. And, so we did some of those plays and a couple of Platonic dialogues.

It ran from 8 until 12, four straight hours – yes, 12 midnight at which time –

KRISTOL: A lot of small talk or just work?

MANSFIELD: At 12, Mrs. Strauss decreed that it must stop, because he had, after all, a heart attack the year before. And so we stopped at 12, and then we had small talk and something to eat. And, so that went on until 1-1:30. And I drove back to Berkeley that night, a pretty tired fellow.

KRISTOL: And in great shape for your lecture the next day, I am sure, to the students. But you encountered Strauss by reading?

MANSFIELD: By reading –

KRISTOL: By reading him –

MANSFIELD: You can say I became a Straussian in 1953 after reading his book, *Natural Right and History*, which came out that year. I took intensive notes and tried my best to keep up with it and I was – I can remember just being totally convinced by his argument in favor of the ancients.

If you're a Straussian, there are, I would say, two obvious things that Strauss taught for us. A Straussian is what I call a follower of Strauss. There are the more pejorative ways to say disciple, implying servility.

But, you know, if we were all slaves, we wouldn't disagree so much on the meaning or interpretation of Strauss.

But – yeah, so the ancients and the moderns, that's what *Natural Right and History* was about. And I would say that he thinks that philosophy today is in so bad a condition that it needs to be revived and it can only be revived by going back over its past history. Philosophy today is modern philosophy, but modern philosophy began as a rebellion against the ancients. You see this, very obviously, in Hobbes and Locke.

So, one needs to go back into that rebellion and that's what Strauss first did with his books on Spinoza and Hobbes. But that led him to the ancients, into reading Greek and especially interpreting Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon, his discovery, his rediscovery. The greatness of Xenophon, he said.

So, that was one point about Strauss – as a Straussian – and the other was the discovery or rediscovery of esoteric writing. So, those two things, the ancients and the moderns and esotericism.

Strauss discovered that philosophers write with two audiences in view. One is political – the people in his time, the people that he may want to improve in some way or reform in some way. But mainly he needs to protect himself from, because philosophy is essentially something subversive. Philosophy questions what most people take for granted. And Strauss always stressed that point.

And therefore what a philosopher had to do defend himself or to protect himself or perhaps also to introduce others to his deeper thinking was to write exoterically so that most people could understand something that he was – some message – take away a message, as we say.

But his main audience was the other ancients or philosophers who would come – or who had come – it was a kind of an inner – a discussion among the centuries or for the centuries with those whom he was writing for and those whose writing he wanted to argue with and present.

And this was a kind of concealed writing, the art of writing, that he wrote a book about this called *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Came out in 1952. And that art of writing is a way to give little signals to those who are able to pick up such signals and are in a mood or an attitude – have an attitude that makes them aware of such things. Small signs, what Machiavelli, *picoli cozi*, little things – numbers, what's in the center of an argument? Contradictions, statements on the same thing – as I said, before a philosopher will say – and you look back and he didn't say it before or if he did, it was a little bit different. So, why? He must have had a reason for that.

KRISTOL: Makes you think.

MANSFIELD: Makes you think. Gives you cause to stop and pause and think about what did that mean, what has he got, what is he doing here? You have to assume that he knew what he was doing and that it

wasn't just that he forgot and he wrote – one day he wrote one thing and then two months later got the same subjects in his book later – he forgot what he wrote two months ago – and said something different, because it came out to him.

This is the way a professor writes, it's not the way philosopher writes. Philosophers are great thinkers. They are not near professors, and if you call a philosophy professor a philosopher, you're misusing the word in the great majority of cases.

KRISTOL: Yes, very overwhelming majority of cases.

MANSFIELD: Yes, overwhelming majority of cases.

KRISTOL: Was that the only class so to speak you ever took with Strauss and the only time you were –

MANSFIELD: Yes, it was.

KRISTOL: Same city, I guess.

MANSFIELD: Yes, and, so then I went back to Harvard to teach a year and a half later in 1962 and started in there as a lecturer, or kind of advanced assistant professor and got tenure in 1965, coincidentally with the publication of my book. Hardly a coincidence, by the way.

KRISTOL: And you stayed in touch with Strauss until his death in 1973?

MANSFIELD: For sure.

KRISTOL: He was intimidating somewhat or not?

MANSFIELD: No, he was not intimidating, except that he was. His –

KRISTOL: Old-fashioned, I mean, sort of –

MANSFIELD: His manner was not intimidating in the least.

KRISTOL: Is that right? He couldn't help but be intimidating, I suppose.

MANSFIELD: That's exactly right. He couldn't help having this great – with such respect one had for such a person – yeah, it was – I mean, before he picked up the phone. But he would say, "Call me," and so on, so I did and I would write to him, so I have a few letters from him in his crabbed, incredibly difficult handwriting.

And once – once there was an incident where this friend, Jacob Klein – Jacob Klein was the dean at St. John's College in Annapolis. And a sort of commanding presence. And was a great friend of Strauss'. And Strauss went to Annapolis toward the end of his life to be with his friend and others, but especially his friend, Jacob Klein.

So, once I invited Klein to give a talk at the American Political Science Association, which was being held in Washington, D.C., close to Annapolis, so he could drive there. And he wrote back and said yes. And this – he gave the talk, which is the talk on *logos*, on reason or speech, which is in his collected essays, one of his best – best performances.

And he wrote back and he said, "Is there an honorarium?"

KRISTOL: For a political science convention?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, so that was the innocence of Jacob Klein to believe that when you're on a panel at the APSA they would pay you for it.

And, so I – for some reason – an imp got into my head and I wrote him back and said, “No, unfortunately, there is no honorarium for this APSA panel, you'll just have to look on it as a way to further your career.” And this was a man of 70 and so on, so that was a fairly impudent thing to say. And he went and complained to Robert Goldwin, who was the new dean at that time, still the same Robert Goldwin I mentioned earlier. And he talked to Strauss about it.

And the next time that I picked up the phone and called Strauss, he said, “Oh, Mr. Mansfield, that was such a wonderful letter you wrote to Mr. Klein.”

KRISTOL: He wasn't offended on his friend's behalf?

MANSFIELD: He was laughing, certainly not. No, no. He loved it, and I, so to speak, played a practical joke on him.

KRISTOL: And in the reading group – I'm just curious – most of us will never have that opportunity. What was it like? Did he do most of the talking, was it more collegial –

MANSFIELD: He did most of the talking.

KRISTOL: Did you actually read the text in his classes at Chicago, you would read the transcripts, some student reads a passage and then he interprets it?

MANSFIELD: I don't remember whether he had a student read it. Possibly he did – one of us. But I think he sat there and raised questions to us and we would try to give answers, we had read the text before, but it wasn't anything like the way he had read it.

KRISTOL: Did you ever feel that whenever you said something – saw something that he hadn't seen?

MANSFIELD: No, I don't think that occurred. Not once. He would ask a question, and he would often have a pencil in his hand and he would start tapping it on the table as we tried to think of something to say. That was intimidating. Like a strict teacher in the *gymnasium* that he went to.

But it was always – he was always laughing. And if you said something that by chance happened to have something true in it, he would smile and beam, “Oh, yeah, how wonderful. I see your point.” Then he would state it in a way you hadn't seen it or known it at all.

So, he was ready, but on the other hand, it did seem as if he was thinking his way through the text. And he was, so to speak, on the frontier, we were reading what he was writing about.

KRISTOL: So, he was thinking –

MANSFIELD: He was thinking about that particular text.

KRISTOL: And then after midnight, what was that discussion like, what topics interested him?

MANSFIELD: Politics, he followed American politics, world politics very closely. That was the day – that was the time of Kennedy versus Nixon, 1960, and so on. He was a very strong supporter of the latter.

KRISTOL: Of Nixon?

MANSFIELD: Of Nixon, and thought that Kennedy was something of an amateur. And Nixon had his eye on the ball a little bit more. Nixon was more aware of the peril we were in.

KRISTOL: More foreign-policy focused, I take it?

MANSFIELD: Yes, that's right, that was very much – so, Strauss' politics were really quite conservative but everything flowed from his anti-Communism at the time.

And, so that was his main concern, and he sort of laughed at the conservative economists, Milton Friedman, or people of that sort – that's all right for them, but the really important thing is foreign affairs, and maybe, also the crime issue. It was Nixon's –

KRISTOL: Beginning to pop up then, I guess?

MANSFIELD: Right.

KRISTOL: And I guess Strauss famously wrote that letter in 1956, I think it was, to the *National Review*, to Willmoore Kendall, I guess, who was a quasi-student of Strauss, I guess, or adult – become a kind of follower of Strauss and was associated with *National Review*. And Strauss complains about *National* – this is about a year after Buckley founded it – being reflexively anti-Israel.

MANSFIELD: Yes.

KRISTOL: That's a very striking letter, tries to correct these certain conservatisms – narrow conservatism of *National Review*.

MANSFIELD: And what action did Strauss take to counter this? He cancelled his free subscription.

KRISTOL: That's the kind of subscriptions you want cancelled if you are a magazine editor.

MANSFIELD: Yes.

KRISTOL: But I think they were kind of chastened by that, maybe, a little bit by that?

MANSFIELD: I think they were, yeah.

KRISTOL: Anyway, 10-15 years later they became – they gradually became not anti-Israel, and in fact, pro-Israel?

MANSFIELD: Right.

KRISTOL: And he cared about Israel, I think?

MANSFIELD: Oh, that's right. That's for sure.

KRISTOL: I mean, that's part –

MANSFIELD: That small country sets an example for us, and he beamed with Jewish pride.

II: Strauss on Burke and Machiavelli (17:50 – 24:51)

KRISTOL: Go back one time to the '53 to '60 period – or '59 – before you actually met him. So, there you read his works and you were influenced by him on Burke, in particular, or everything really – I mean it sounds like the whole understanding of ancients and moderns and the art of writing – it wasn't just that you saw his interpretation of Burke was – opened some new doors for you as a Burke scholar.

MANSFIELD: No, and I have to say that really he set me right on my dissertation on the subject and the point of my dissertation, which was –

KRISTOL: In what way?

MANSFIELD: He said that the crucial thing was that Burke made party respectable. Made – previously, it seemed that if a free country could – couldn't live with party factionalism, or if it did, it was – the factionalism was always between the gentlemen and the plebeians, and that's how it is in Machiavelli, the nobles and the ignobles.

But Strauss said, for the first time, Burke saw that gentlemen could disagree – people whose ethical standing – moral standing was solid – could disagree on political and partisan measures, and that it was good for them to get together and form parties opposed to each other.

KRISTOL: And the gentlemen would kind of lead a democracy or quasi-democracy, I guess, through parties as opposed to scorning parties, I guess. And that was a Strauss insight or – it's your insight, of course?

MANSFIELD: I developed a little bit, but – I'm not in a position to claim credit.

KRISTOL: To the contrary.

MANSFIELD: Yeah.

KRISTOL: In those years, you were – it's interesting – you hadn't met him until after the dissertation?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, I met a couple of his students who were then teaching at Harvard.

KRISTOL: Who?

MANSFIELD: Richard Cox and David Lowenthal. They were both instructors in the government department, and actually the government department had taken notice of Strauss.

KRISTOL: That's interesting.

MANSFIELD: And they wrote to him and said, "We would like to hire one or two of your students to teach with us." And, so he proposed those two. Neither of them caught on, but they're both great fellows and we're still friends much, much later. But I spent a lot of time with David Lowenthal, especially. Richard Cox went from Harvard to Berkeley, so I was then his colleague when I was Berkeley from '60 to '62.

KRISTOL: And Cox and Lowenthal had actually been students of Strauss at either the New School or Chicago?

MANSFIELD: They were at – well, David Lowenthal at the New School and possibly Cox at Chicago, I'm not sure when he – yeah, I think it was in Chicago.

KRISTOL: So, they were helpful?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, they were helpful and they pointed things out and –

KRISTOL: After the Burke book, you really moved to Machiavelli as a major object of interest, and how much was that influenced by Strauss and especially by *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, which would have come out, I guess, in '58?

MANSFIELD: That came out in 1958. I think I was interested in Machiavelli before that.

KRISTOL: A taste for Machiavelli?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, but still when that book came out that again was a chastening experience because I'd had my eye on Machiavelli – and, no, it wasn't everything done. So – but I read the book carefully and I saw that he had the generosity to leave certain things unsaid or unexplored.

So, I wrote a big fat book on Machiavelli. Big and fat for me, anyway, which was a commentary on Machiavelli's *Discourses*. Even though in the footnotes of *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Strauss says that a commentary on the *Discourses* would run to many volumes.

KRISTOL: He didn't appreciate your gift of compression?

MANSFIELD: Concise.

KRISTOL: And did you discuss Machiavelli actually with Strauss?

MANSFIELD: No, I didn't. Not really I didn't. Now and again –

KRISTOL: Did you ask him questions when you were puzzled about something?

MANSFIELD: I asked him about Savonarola, for example, and he said, "Oh, yes, you must study that." I never have yet. But I keep recommending it, passing out the recommendation to others. The importance of Savonarola for Machiavelli was something he said he discovered only towards the end of the writing of his book.

There's a story about Strauss and one of his students at Chicago, which maybe I could –

KRISTOL: Please, sure.

MANSFIELD: And this is Warren Winiarski. Warren Winiarski was a graduate student in the political science department at Chicago, and he, too, was interested in Machiavelli but when – and he was writing his dissertation on Machiavelli. But when *Thoughts on Machiavelli* came out he looked at it and said, "I have nothing to say." And, so he packed up his family in a station-wagon and drove to California.

And he got into the wine business. He went to work for Robert Mondavi, and he later founded his own company, found his own terroir – place to grow grapes in a section of the Napa Valley that hadn't been used before. Stag's Leaps Wine Cellars was his name, and he became the most famous of the California winemakers, one who won a competition in 1973 against, first, Grande Chateau and Grande Cru in Paris.

So, that was a sign of what you can do if you defer to Strauss.

KRISTOL: Right, leave the academy. And become an excellent winemaker, however.

MANSFIELD: Yeah, very well educated.

KRISTOL: Did he say the study of Machiavelli or Strauss helped him in the wine business?

MANSFIELD: Yes, he did. He used to give a talk on wine in which the making of wine has three elements to it: nature, art, and chance. That comes from Aristotle.

III: Great Contemporaries (24:52 – 38:05)

KRISTOL: Seth Benardete, one of Strauss' greatest students?

MANSFIELD: Yeah. I got to know him.

KRISTOL: You knew him when you were both quite young, right?

MANSFIELD: I did. I was introduced to him by Allan Bloom, and it was funny that – that he had to introduce me, because at that time Seth Benardete was a junior fellow at Harvard and you know living –

KRISTOL: Oh, I thought you had met him through Harvard connections –

MANSFIELD: No, no, actually living in Elliott House where I was a tutor and Benardete had a – had his lodgings.

KRISTOL: That's very Harvard-like that you would both be in the same house and never, of course, think to introduce yourselves to each other.

MANSFIELD: From then on we became constant lunch companions, and that was exciting and wonderful to watch. Benardete was the most gifted of Strauss' students. He really knew Greek, had a fantastic knowledge of Greek. Most of Strauss' know Greek, but not as a classicist knows it. He did and he was in the Classics Department. And finally secured for himself a reputation – towards the end of his life – that he deserved all along.

But he was different because he was a great philologist who was also a great philosopher, and he could put those together in a way that none of us, quote philosophers, could and none of the philologists in Classics Departments could. So, it was wonderful to watch him at lunch.

We would go sit with somebody new or some student or some graduate student or some senior professor, and Benardete would start the conversation innocently with a question, you know, "What about this, or what are you doing, what are you working on?" And after about five minutes, he had completely flummoxed whoever it was. It didn't take that long for most of them and showed them that they didn't have the faintest idea of the proper way to go about studying the subject that they claimed to be working on, perhaps, for several years before.

KRISTOL: No wonder he was so popular with his colleagues –

MANSFIELD: Yes, and with a master of Elliot House, was John Findley, famous Harvard classicist. So, Benardete never learned to hold his fire. And Strauss once said of him that he was so intelligent that he should have had a greater capacity to write more understandably –

KRISTOL: Yes, I was going to say it would have been helpful if you had encouraged him to be a little more accessible to people like me, though super impressive, but a little hard to penetrate.

MANSFIELD: You see how impressive Strauss was in that Benardete knew that much about Greek and he had read very widely in the history of philosophy. But Strauss, in addition to that, knew all the Arabs and the Jews even. Hebrew – and he knew Arabic and Aramaic and all those languages.

So, none of his students had this comprehensive capability or came anywhere close to it.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that is really striking.

MANSFIELD: You could still make it – and there was a definite sort of gap between Strauss and the Straussians, which is sometimes taken advantage of by his enemies.

KRISTOL: And Allan Bloom, just to close the discussion – I didn't realize you had known him when you were both so young – if he had introduce to Benardete – how did you get to know him?

MANSFIELD: I got to know him in the 50s, late 50s, while I was a graduate student and I think – then he was teaching at Yale. He was a couple of years ahead of me. He had finished and started teaching – he spent one year at Yale. And, so, he came up to Harvard now and again to talk to Benardete. And, so I got to know him and then, of course, Benardete.

Yeah, he was – so – I was going to use a phrase, which I mustn't use, he was, I would say, the most explosive comic personality I've known in my life, full of jokes. His classes were constant laughter. You could stand outside the room and hear the students explode into laughter every few minutes when he was talking to them.

He was a very, very funny guy. He's a very, very good joke teller. He not only could tell jokes, but he could remember them. That was what was striking about that. But the only ones I remember – I just remember one or two and once again I couldn't repeat them.

So, he was a very funny guy and just a brilliant man with a personality. He liked to speak French and scatter French words – spoke French very well, because he spent a lot of time in Paris, with Kojève and with some of Raymond Aron's students, the great Pierre Manent among them.

And, so – yeah, he – he was just a brilliant fellow. And I became quite close to him and actually married one of his students, Delba Winthrop, a student who had been with him at Cornell. And she applied to Harvard graduate school.

At that time there was a kind of – this was in the late 60s – there came to be a kind of freedom trail going from Cornell to Harvard, and he would pick up and gather students in Cornell, and then he would send them to me for polishing at Harvard. That's how he put it.

KRISTOL: That's how he put it, or you put it?

MANSFIELD: Yeah – well, I said that in his presence once and he said, "Oh, but you polish them up so well." So, Delba Winthrop was one of those students that came from Harvard, Cornell –

KRISTOL: You owe Bloom a lot?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, I owe Bloom a lot. He was best man at our wedding. So that was –

KRISTOL: Did you know his book, *Closing of the American Mind*, was going to be a big success when he wrote it – did you help him with it?

MANSFIELD: No, I didn't help him with it. He did it all on his own, and he sent it to me when he finished the manuscript. I read it. I actually told him, "This is going to make you famous."

KRISTOL: You were right.

MANSFIELD: Damned if I wasn't right.

KRISTOL: Did you enjoy his enjoying being famous?

MANSFIELD: I did.

KRISTOL: Was it fun to be a friend of Bloom's for those few years?

MANSFIELD: Bloom was a great spender all his life. But for the first time he could afford it. So, we always used to compare each other, so I had many more expenses than he did with a wife and there was a divorce, there were three kids and so on and – but I was never in debt and he was always in debt, just paying for himself. He liked to treat himself to the finest things in life. He thought the finest things were beautiful, and you shouldn't rob yourself of beautiful things.

So, he went shopping in places like Hermès in Paris, and Delba – my wife and I – would accompany him sometimes on these shopping expeditions. They're memorialized in Saul Bellow's novel about him, *Ravelstein*. He would try to get me to, you know, get my toes wet and buy something really small. No, no, I refused. But I always liked to buy my clothes at Filene's Basement.

In those days, Filene's Basement had wonderful clothes from the best stores, sold cheaply and – so, he once told me, he says, "Harvey likes to dress like Louis XIV from Filene's Basement." I thought, of course, that that was a great compliment. But for him, that was criticism.

If you liked to wear beautiful things like Louis XIV, you should want to pay for them, full price.

KRISTOL: A strange principle.

MANSFIELD: So, that was when I realized I had a certain amount of bourgeois virtue.

KRISTOL: Which he lacked?

MANSFIELD: Which he lacked. He had a magnificent lack of bourgeois virtue, you could say.

KRISTOL: And the book, *Closing the American Mind*, I think you wrote about it or you defended it against the attacks after it came out?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, one attack. From Richard Rorty. One of the few things I've done in the *New Republic*.

KRISTOL: Do you think the book still has sort of –

MANSFIELD: Yeah, we had a conference on *The Closing of the American Mind* a couple of years ago on its 25th anniversary and – yes, I do think it's still the best book on the American university today. I mean, some things are obviously obsolete after 25 years, but the main thesis of it – what portends to be a great opening of the American mind is actually a great closing – is, I think, altogether valid and very well proved.

KRISTOL: Let me ask you about one other Straussian, more or less, contemporary of yours. I remember you praising him very highly to me when I was in grad school and a student of yours, and I went and audited his class a bit at Boston College – and that was Father Ernest Fortin, who, I think, you had a high regard, for I think?

MANSFIELD: Very high regard.

KRISTOL: You were pretty close, too, I think?

MANSFIELD: What?

KRISTOL: You were pretty close to him?

MANSFIELD: Yes, I was quite close to him.

KRISTOL: So say a word about him, because he's been unjustly not recognized for the magnitude of his accomplishments, really.

MANSFIELD: He was a Straussian of Christianity – of Christian thought – which meant of the Church fathers all the way up to and past the Scholastics. So for that 1,000-year period, he was an expert and he never had the kind of position where he could get the students he deserved.

But there were a lot of good people that he worked with. He was in the Assumptionist Order, very small order, it's located – or began in Canada and also in France. So he spoke French very well. And he was a wonderful Latinist, St. Augustine, but not just – not only St. Augustine, Clement of Alexandria, others of the Church fathers he knew.

And he showed that they followed some of the same practices of philosophy, of esoteric philosophy that Strauss had found in the Greeks and in the Jews and the Arabs later on. So – and I don't think that his work has been sufficiently appreciated and certainly it hasn't been sufficiently followed up and filled out.

KRISTOL: Someone told me – someone that I respect – I don't remember who – that his work on Dante was sort of, you know – just uncovered Dante in a way that hadn't been done in 600 years or something like that.

MANSFIELD: That's right. Yes, he discovered that there were discoveries behind the obvious discoveries. Dante seems to be an obvious candidate for esoteric writer, but beyond that there was much more questioning of Christianity than most people were aware of and that Dante really was new, that there was a tension between Christian and philosopher but he managed somehow politically to put those two together. And that was how Ernest Fortin presented Dante, the depth of Dante – he really showed for the first time.

IV: The American Founding and Harry Jaffa (37:50 – 53:30)

KRISTOL: Another prominent student of Leo Strauss is Harry Jaffa, who, I think, was a very – the one you've known the longest, I guess, is that right?

MANSFIELD: That is right, yes. We had a little bit of a falling out but we're now friends again and certainly owe a great deal, I think, to Harry Jaffa. Harry Jaffa was a student of Strauss at the New School for Social Research, and he did his dissertation on Thomism and Aristotelianism. The difference between Aristotle's ethics and Thomas – St. Thomas' ethics, which gave a Christian cast to Aristotle.

And I first knew him when I was in high school, actually, and that was in the late 40s, and he was an assistant professor at Ohio State where my father was chairman of the political science department. There's a little history there, too.

My father had taught at Yale in the 1930s, and Harry Jaffa was an undergraduate at Yale, and he once encountered my father – I think he took a course from him – although he majored in English and my father was a political scientist, and Harry said he was interested in graduate school and having an academic career. And my father said, "You can't. You're a Jew; they'll never hire you." And then ten years later at Ohio State, my father hired him.

He was the first one to hire Jews in the political science department at Ohio State, and he hired three of them. And then as he later liked to say the three of them hated each other.

KRISTOL: Sounds like a Jewish joke.

MANSFIELD: It was a Jewish joke. So, one of the others was David Spitz, who was also a political theorist. I first got interested in political theory through David Spitz. But when Harry came, I switched my allegiance, my teenage allegiance from one to the other and then went off to Harvard.

And saw Harry on vacations. I wasn't yet a Straussian and I – he didn't – unlike his usual way, he didn't really push it. He's a great pusher.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's not my image of him, restrained and –

MANSFIELD: Then later on, he got a job as professor at Claremont McKenna, one of those five colleges in Southern California, and became a great force, he got a great name. He wrote speeches for Barry Goldwater. Became friends of Henry Salvatori, a very rich California oilman, I think, and who gave him a lot of money to set up an institute.

And Harry became a commanding figure in – in those colleges, gathering around him lots of students, both undergraduate and graduate. And he became the head of what was known as West Coast Straussianism.

And now I'm going to exaggerate, or maybe be a little unfair, that was a point of view, which said that "Leo Strauss is the same as America, and America is the same as natural law." So, he had taken Strauss' natural right, which I think was much more ambiguous, ambivalent, and he turned it into Christian or semi-Christian natural law, something he had failed to do in his earlier dissertation on Aristotelianism and Thomism, and added to it Lincoln and the America Founders as devotees of natural law. And therefore sort of indirectly and – and not very vaguely – disciples of Leo Strauss, or people who Leo Strauss understood better than they understood themselves.

So, he wrapped this up in a package that attracted a lot of people, and he began to attack his friends on the East Coast who didn't quite believe this, didn't think that there was – it was that easy to translate philosophy into politics. And thought rather that Strauss' whole view was that it wasn't easy and the idea of politics enlightened by philosophy was a very dubious one because it seems to be the essence of politics to protect itself from philosophy by answering questions instead of raising them.

KRISTOL: The realm of opinion – Strauss stresses that so often.

MANSFIELD: He does, and politics deserves exoteric advice and philosophy esoteric, so that whole distinction seemed to be violated by Harry's West Coast heresy. So people like Allan Bloom and Walter Berns and Joseph Cropsey, all of them friends of Harry, began to question this, not sort of directly in print.

But that didn't matter because Harry started attacking them one by one, and he had always accepted me, because I agreed with Harry Jaffa's critics and not with Harry, until a point when I deliberately provoked him by saying that the Declaration of Independence was based on a self-evident half-truth.

KRISTOL: That all men are created equal.

MANSFIELD: His great point was that America was inspired by Lincoln, and Lincoln was inspired by the Declaration of Independence, not untrue. But that the most – the crucial thing was the statement of self-evident truths in the Declaration, all men are created equal and therefore rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and the right to consent, which wraps up those three first rights and delivers them into political form.

So I said to him, "The Declaration was this great truth, self-evident truth, but it seemed to me, and perhaps also to common sense, that it's also true that men are self-evidently unequal," so it's harder than – so, what the Declaration was doing was taking one half of the truth and making the rest of the truth conform to that sort of one half, and I think that's really what America does. It doesn't flat out deny that human beings are unequal, but it subordinates that part of the truth to the main truth, the main political truth that all men are created equal.

KRISTOL: And I suppose from a sort of Aristotelian point of view you're going to have to have one dominant political truth, anyway. So, it's not a criticism of America exactly to say –

MANSFIELD: No, it isn't.

KRISTOL: It just raises the question –

MANSFIELD: It's a view that America is a political regime. Maybe it's the best, but it's still a regime like all the others and every single political regime is partisan, which means biased and which means it's a whole that has a certain cast to it.

And, so it's pretty clear that our republic has a democratic cast to it and is fundamentally inspired by the democratic idea of equality – also, too, by the democratic idea of liberty and liberty allows for the expression, the flourishing of unequal talents, but somehow this whole must contribute to or be understood as subordinate to the main truth.

So, it seems to me that he was simplifying things a little bit too much and that he was, perhaps, even simplifying Lincoln too much. One thing that this did was to – how do I say? – deny, or deprecate the importance of the Constitution.

The Constitution came after the Declaration obviously, and was indeed inspired by it, but it gave life to it. The Declaration left – was kind of vague. You have a right to consent, but it didn't tell you what to consent to. And in fact, if you read the Declaration you might think that it's perfectly all right for a free people to be ruled by a king as long as the king behaved himself or had limitations on him, which would preserve their freedoms.

And, so it's not necessarily, I think, a democratic or republican regime, and what the Constitution does is to bring together these less democratic and republican things under the republican principle that – which is that all men are created equal, and therefore the consent should be by the majority – to a government that extends and continues the principle of consent and doesn't have just have consent for once – and you might elect a king when the first one dies or some such provision for a limited or constitutional monarchy as the British have.

So – and the Constitution, for the first time, made a republic possible and feasible and totally republican. That was the great claim of James Madison.

KRISTOL: In *The Federalist Papers* – I want to ask you about *The Federalist Papers* in a second. As an undergraduate, I read Jaffa's *Crisis of the House Divided*, which I think was originally published in '59 and which was sort of pre- his West Coast Straussian proselytizing, and I – it had a big influence on me just because of the depth of the analysis of Lincoln and Lincoln's speeches and Lincoln's actions, understanding them as more than just partisan jockeying or personal jockeying. I wonder, did the book?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, that was a wonderful book. And that had a great influence on me. And you're right, I should have mentioned it as a great accomplishment of Harry's. That's *the* accomplishment of his life to have given philosophical weight to this great man, this great political man. And also some weight to the controversies he was involved in.

He especially brought up the debate between Lincoln and Douglas, the Lincoln-Douglas debates – that is something, which should be read in every undergraduate American government course. Douglas stood for what he called “popular sovereignty,” and that meant the question of slavery ought to be put to a vote.

And Lincoln said, “No, that freedom comes first.” That's what gives you the vote and if you don't have the vote, then it can't be taken – it can't be conferred on you or taken away from you by somebody else's vote.

The blacks were slaves were not allowed to vote as to whether they would – their slavery should continue or not so that meant that – that was a kind of strike against relativism, against liberal relativism. Because most of the liberals were relativists, and they thought that freedom meant you had a right to believe anything and to espouse anything – were wrong according to Lincoln. And he showed that they were wrong. And he won an election the next time. When he debated Douglas in 1858, he lost but then he won two years later as President.

And he was able to put the argument and the Republican Party was able to put the argument that freedom required a hostility to slavery, maybe not the abolition immediately, but in the long run, surely. So, in other words, there were certain principles of liberalism, which are true and must be accepted.

KRISTOL: What struck me also about when I read *Crisis*, I remember, the first time, was the combination of these – sort of Lincoln’s depth of understanding of the principles, but Jaffa’s explanation of Lincoln’s political skills and ability not to say everything all at once and to marshal coalition and to – as you say – win the 1860 election.

The irony has always seemed to me that Jaffa in his later work loses sight of the need for – I mean, it all becomes doctrine. It doesn’t –

MANSFIELD: That’s probably true.

KRISTOL: Less politics, somehow. Say the right thing over and over; somehow you’re going to win, or you know, if you expose intellectual mistakes, that’s enough for political victory, which is I think quite true.

MANSFIELD: I think building a political coalition where you can learn how to do that by reading the philosophers and seeing how they found it necessary to qualify, modify, re-state, sometimes even to conceal what they believed for – what was philosophically true and to translate it into what might be politically helpful.

And, yes, Lincoln was great at that. Who knows how much of a philosopher he was, but still he had that aspect and he was able to look at politics from above and therefore he was not doctrinaire like the abolitionists – but he was also not unprincipled like Stephen Douglas.

V: America’s Constitutional Soul (53:30 – 1:03:16)

KRISTOL: You wrote more on America, on American things, let’s say, beginning in, I guess, the 70s, maybe, but in reaction to the 60s first, the essays on liberalism – on various – *The Spirit of Liberalism* – and various liberal thinkers that were good defenders of liberalism, and then essays that were collected in the book, *America’s Constitutional Soul*.

MANSFIELD: First, *The Spirit of Liberalism* – was my first try and then, yeah, *America’s Constitutional Soul*.

KRISTOL: And why does America have a constitutional soul?

MANSFIELD: That was my idea that the Constitution can mean two things. It can mean limited government, so if you have a Constitutional government, you have a limited government. And that’s the way most conservatives and liberals today think of the Constitution. It’s what is laid down beforehand and limits, which may or may not expanded, but limits to what you can – to what a government can do.

And therefore some countries have constitutional government, and others do not. Some of those that do not, like the Soviet Union with its 1936 constitution, merely pretend to be constitutional so there’s a distinction.

But the other meaning of constitution is the Aristotelian meaning as a way of life, that which pervades the whole country. And, so in that sense every country has a constitution. It doesn’t make any sense to say that there’s – that a country is unconstitutional because it is what it is in everything that it does.

So America has a certain kind of democracy, and you see it in everything. For example, we vote, so – and so whenever we’ve got a question to decide as a group, we take a vote. We also have a president, so it’s not just a Quaker meeting where nobody presides, although in fact – in point of fact, even the Quakers use sort of hidden concealed people who preside.

Still, because our Constitution has a president, this is a republic with much more one-man-rules-all-throughout-society than you would expect in a republic. The republican principle is “many hands are safer and wiser than few hands.” And somehow our Constitution was able to combine the energy and decisiveness of one pair of hands with the consent needed to make this palatable to the whole country.

And, so this is – we have CEOs, we have university presidents – very democratic faculties. They meekly give in to anything that the university president says.

KRISTOL: That's because each professor gets to be a mini-dictator in his classroom in an unrepugnant way?

MANSFIELD: You could say that, sure. Anyway – so it's this way of life that is the soul of our Constitution. So, it's a limited Constitution, yes, but it's also an unlimited constitution in that it pervades the whole society that it presides over.

So, this liberal distinction between state and society or state and civil society is not really quite true – the civil society part. The so-called nonpolitical part really is political, it is the way it is because of the kind of constitution that we have.

KRISTOL: I think you've argued, several times, that liberal democracy is a kind of mixed regime, which also seems to be a sort of attempt to get beneath the surface and use Aristotelian analysis, Tocquevillian analysis or something to show complexity –

MANSFIELD: Show the complexity, yeah, that – for Aristotle every regime is a mix of a few and the many. You always need the many because the many stand for everybody. They claim to represent everybody, and every regime needs to cover everybody. So, every regime needs to be a whole.

But within that whole there needs to be distinction, because everybody is not just anybody, but some people are more interesting or important, more wise, more noble, come from a better family, or a better race, all these human distinctions that are made and those are best made – are most clearly made by the few who represent them.

So, the few present themselves as a kind of reproach or critique of the whole, which is made by the many. So, you apply that to our parties today in America. The Democratic Party is the party of the many. It stands for inclusiveness; everybody should be brought together, so immigration – open the doors. Open the doors, and remove the barriers.

Distinctions always make barriers. Do you have a Ph.D. or don't you? Whereas the Republicans are really the party of the few, and that's true despite the fact that they sometimes win elections and always have to appeal to the many. But they appeal to what distinguishes people from one another.

The Republican Party, now I would say, is the party of virtue and also the party of money. So, if you're serious about virtue or serious about money, you're likely to be a Republican. The trouble is that virtue and money are opposed –

KRISTOL: Right, and tensions within –

MANSFIELD: Yeah, so that's what makes the split you can say between the libertarians and the social conservatives. So this is schismatic –

KRISTOL: But the Democrats have their elites, too. I think in some of your writings you talk about how in some ways there's splits among between oligarchs of the few or whatever.

MANSFIELD: They're – I mean all the liberals at Harvard are glad they're at Harvard rather than some, I have to say, lesser place. And that's a kind of distinction, which has been sold to the Democrats or to democracy as a whole.

So the American people are a democracy, but a democracy, which is relatively much more tolerant of inequalities, inequalities of talent, intelligence, artistic genius, of sports, athletic prowess and of riches –

KRISTOL: Wealth.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. Than many other democracies, much more so than the democratic principle taken purely or simply would dictate or permit.

KRISTOL: You suggest sometimes that those who benefit from these different inequalities should understand the regime in which they are living and be a little more self-conscious, perhaps, of that.

MANSFIELD: I think that's right, yes. That – what happens is that those who are rich don't appreciate those who are smart and vice versa. So, when President Eisenhower was president, he said – he was proud to say that he had a Cabinet of people, everyone of which could meet a payroll. That's a successful businessman.

But the trouble from a professor's point of view is that none of those people could meet a class. So, it's a difference between people who can meet a payroll and people who can meet a class, and the conservative business elite versus the elite of intellectuals.

And John Locke who, you could say, was the founder of liberalism, had an argument for both. So, he was farseeing. He saw that to be comprehensive you need to have a right of property, which would be unequally exploited by those who are better able to make money than others. And you also needed a right of toleration, which meant free speech, which, too, would be unequally exploited.

So, professors who have access to TV and radio far more than the average person or than the average businessman forget how they profit from the inequalities of our democracy when they attack inequality. By inequality, they always mean the rich, you know. They never think of themselves as benefiting from inequality or being unequal but they are.

VI: The Decline of Liberalism (1:03:16 – 1:08:30)

KRISTOL: This is sort of an even-handed account, I'd say, you've just given of liberalism and conservatism in a way, each with their characteristic elites, each with limitations, but it seems to me you've been tough on liberalism, in particular, in the last 20-30 years. You claim it's degenerated from the liberalism of your father's generation and your youth?

MANSFIELD: That's right. Those were Cold War liberals, and that was when I was young. The most obvious degeneration, but out of relativism and out of deference to the Left – no enemy on the Left. And essentially respecting the claim of democracy that the Communists made that their democracy, a social or economic democracy, was more democratic than our democracy, which was a political democracy and not always socially or economically democratic.

And, yes, so you could have this vanguard government, which would sort of bypass political democracy in favor of real democracy for most people – the average person – and that was a more real democracy than what America had. And that I think was very, very dangerous and wrong.

So, I – it was on that issue that I turned against the liberals.

KRISTOL: The liberals have moved more in that direction?

MANSFIELD: Yes, they have.

KRISTOL: They love the courts, they love the experts, expertise, very distrustful of the common people.

MANSFIELD: Yes, they have.

KRISTOL: Different from Al Smith's liberalism or whatever?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, they don't stand up for the right to consent. Cass Sunstein, a very prominent liberal, has written a book on nudging – *The Nudge* – saying you can't argue face to face, confront and argument, but you nudge somebody in the direction you want them to go. Manipulation. They speak against the manipulation of the rich while indulging in it and justifying it on their own part.

KRISTOL: Any hope for liberalism to come back?

MANSFIELD: The debt. Will the prospect of an ominous black cloud of debt hanging over the liberal future, will that bring them to their senses? Maybe not. That I would say is – stands for – this cloud stands for reality as liberals may have to face it. Maybe not right away, or obviously not right away, but when it comes, I don't see how we can go on as we are.

KRISTOL: 9/11 had an effect on liberalism for a while and foreign policy and one thought in 2002, 2003, there might be a kind of Cold War liberalism again that would be a War on Terror liberalism, but I think that – maybe Bush mishandled things or maybe just they couldn't sustain it internally somehow. But that's faded –

MANSFIELD: Maybe that is a good criticism of Bush, but he didn't make the argument in a way, which would convince liberals –

KRISTOL: Maybe it was undoable, I don't know.

MANSFIELD: Maybe it was. 9/11 should have convinced liberals that multiculturalism is wrong, it was a failure, that there are differences of culture, which we cannot paper over. And these terrorists said – well, they defined it this way that “We are the party of – you're the party of life, we're the party of death.”

So you're scared. You're not willing to risk anything. So – and we can frighten you, and that's what we're going to do, because we're not afraid to die. And, so liberals need to think it to themselves what is their answer to this? Is there something they would die for? Is there? Is there really a principle in liberalism?

Because the effectual truth over principle is that you're willing to fight for it. And if you're going to fight that doesn't mean just propose programs to benefit various classes of citizens, it may mean to sacrifice your life or to fight wars, as we're now doing against the terrorists.

So on the basis of what principle would you sacrifice your life, or are you just a chicken?

[END]