

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Harvey Mansfield, Professor, Harvard University

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### **I: Thinking about Democracy (00:15 – 20:08)**

KRISTOL: I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. And I'm very pleased to be joined today by Harvey Mansfield. And we're going to discuss one thinker, Alexis de Tocqueville, about whom you've written a fair amount, especially in recent years. And, of course, you and Delba Winthrop translated his great *Democracy in America*. And you have a long introduction to that. And then you wrote a very serious, a very short introduction to Tocqueville, which is a very fine book and everyone should read it.

But I guess I've been struck reading you on Tocqueville, it seems to be more – you seem to admire Tocqueville, I would say, maybe – I mean, you, of course, admire him as you do all these great thinkers – but maybe there's a little more of a personal admiration for Tocqueville. Is that right?

MANSFIELD: I like the French for one thing, and especially Tocqueville – such a brilliant stylist and such a wonderful thinker, such a concealed thinker. He's always telling you what he thinks but he never sums it up. So when you read, you have to do your own thinking and your own summing up to find his position.

For example, he says he's bringing a new political science for a new world, meaning the new world of democracy because the world is an idea, not just a piece of geography. So you need a new political science for it. He says that right at the beginning of this book but he never tells you what it is. That's the last reference to it. So that's a kind of challenge. That's another reason why I like him, but then that's true of all the great thinkers.

KRISTOL: But Tocqueville maybe even more, don't you think, just to spend a minute on this, the presenting himself as having all these observations but no real, not being systematic the way Hobbes or Locke or –

MANSFIELD: Or the other systematists of his time like Gobineau, his friend and so on. So he was not a systematic person or a systematic writer, and he was not a – he never called himself a philosopher, though I think he was. He spends a lot of time criticizing philosophy. But he wrote the best book on America and the best book on democracy. That's what Delba Winthrop and I said in our introduction to the translation. And I can't help liking him.

KRISTOL: Just one more point, but even though he's not, he doesn't present himself as a systematist. Your argument obviously is that he had – this isn't just disconnected observations, there is a new political science, even though it doesn't look like –

MANSFIELD: Oh, no. Oh, no, there is a new political science there. It isn't just something he threw out, and it's something he placed there for us to think about and for us to come to a conclusion about, guided by the hints and by the remarks which he makes later. And so it's real thinking that he's calling forward, and not just inspiration or scattered insights. No.

KRISTOL: And the real thinking is about democracy, I suppose, first and foremost.

MANSFIELD: That's right, that's what we live in, that's for us. As the ancients said, there's a difference between knowledge in itself and knowledge for us. And Tocqueville's specialty is knowledge for us. We live in a democracy, and what's more immediate and urgent than for us to know about the ideas and the practices we live in?

KRISTOL: And he says it's providential and, I suppose, inevitable that we, that democracy was going to develop. What does he mean by that?

MANSFIELD: That's right. He spoke – he said that in the introduction to *Democracy in America*. He says it's a providential fact. It's several different kinds of fact, as he says. A generative fact, but a providential fact.

But that turns out not to mean that it's a mysterious fact because he gives you some evidence for it, and he goes back 700 years to the Catholic Church. At that time, he says the Church opened its ranks, opened the ranks of the clergy to commoners, not just – you didn't have to be a noble to be a member of the clergy. That already is a principle of merit, of rising and of, which is democratic in its – in its initial motion he might say.

And then all other events, especially the various policies of the kings of France and of Spain, contrary to the nobility in both cases. And that, in general, the kings followed a policy of opposing the nobles by allying with the people that incidentally, not intentionally but incidentally helped bring along democracy. Meanwhile, with the monarchies, they were being administered in a more and more rational spirit. This he talks about in his second great book, *The Old Regime*, which came out in 1856 about 20 years later after *Democracy in America*. And there he speaks of the way in which the various advisors to the king, above all Richelieu and Mazarin, advisors to Louis XIII and Louis XIV, developed a bureaucracy based on rational principles that was intended to replace the feudal government of the nobles and had that effect. Well, there again, bureaucracy, a rational administration allows people of merit to rise out of the common – out of the common people and become important and useful to the monarchy.

So you had these two things then, the monarchy itself and its policies of rational administration, which weren't meant to be democratic but which brought along democracy. So that's the kind of providential fact, which has produced democracy, he says. And so that – perhaps what he says, a reason why he calls it a fact and providential is that he wants you to accept it. It's not something you can refuse to admit, and I think this would be especially directed at the reactionaries of France, his fellow countrymen who wanted those of – those of them who wanted to go back to the time before the French Revolution to sort of reverse it, repeal it and reverse it. And that they couldn't do, he said, because democracy is here to stay with us.

And then that turns out to be a kind of necessity, the acceptance of a fact leads to its understanding as a necessity. But it isn't all necessity. It's partly choice. So you can decide how you react to this fact of democracy, and you can make democracy useful and compatible with liberty or malicious and leading to a kind of despotism.

So that's the choice between us. And human choice is just like this, generally speaking, it's within necessity – some things you have to accept, the nature of nature, the nature of human history or what events have set before you. But you have freedom to act within them and you can say – I think then this would be part of his philosophy – that the whole of democracy in America is intended to establish the

possibility and the difficulties of making that choice, a choice which turns out to be the choice for political liberty.

KRISTOL: Somehow it's important for him, I think, to not emphasize the degree to which democracy itself is a choice, as you say, that that has to be taken for granted, maybe partly so the aristocrats don't keep fighting it and maybe in a deeper way also so democrats themselves aren't too proud.

I was thinking about this because we were having this conversation – October 27th, I guess it is, 2014. And I happened to just read this morning, and it occurred to me this is the anniversary of *Federalist 1* that was published on October 27th, in that newspaper in New York 227 years ago, if I've done, yeah, if I did the math correctly. But it's quite a contrast because *Federalist 1* emphasizes this is the moment where we choose good government by reflection and choice but that also is to self-government, democratic government. And it's striking how much Tocqueville's introduction cuts against, I would say, that kind of pride in founding because he wants to somehow –

MANSFIELD: It does. Yeah, well, reflection in choice as opposed to force and accident. And so and but it turns out I think even in *The Federalist* that reflection and choice has to take place together with the – a recognition of the influence of force and accident. And in fact, *The Federalist*, as you know, begins very soon to explain just why the present situation of America, 1787, is a crisis and needs to be faced. It's a necessary thing, an urgent thing, and here is our response to it.

KRISTOL: And the necessity of union, I think, is the first, so it's a necessity, I mean, it's not simply a choice but Tocqueville seems to really want to – don't you think? – I don't know, under – mute democratic pride a little bit.

MANSFIELD: I think he does. He wants to sustain it and limit it and discipline it. I think that's true.

And also liberal pride, this goes against the notion of that you can just make your government from the start from some – from out of no government, out of a state of nature in which people are mere individuals.

No, you – a political situation is always there. Politics is always there. So if you want to think politically, you can't begin from the beginning as you would like it. That I think is a real truth about, let's call it a profound truth about politics, democratic politics. To be responsible in democratic politics means not to suppose that you can begin from the beginning and not to expect it, and, therefore, not to blame too much the people who came before you.

KRISTOL: So this is a sort of deep criticism of Hobbes and Locke or at least a modification, I suppose.

MANSFIELD: I think, so, yeah. It goes against this constructivist notion of liberalism that wants to start from, zero-based liberalism, you could say. So, Tocqueville is much closer to hear the wisdom of the ancients and to Aristotle's famous definition of man: A man is by nature a political animal. Meaning we always have our politics with us, even when we don't like it or even when we don't want it.

KRISTOL: And I suppose the spirit of Aristotle is you live in a democracy or an oligarchy and then you moderate them and elevate them as much as possible. That does seem to be more Tocqueville's way of approaching it than a kind of construction from the state of nature.

MANSFIELD: Yes. When you read Aristotle's *Politics*, you see Aristotle trying to make you as a reader into a political scientist but not a political scientist who just judges or watches from the outside but who actually makes arguments, political arguments, within it, within politics. So all of his political science you could say is directed toward the possibility of a mixed regime, of some kind of mixture of the various elements of human nature that otherwise make us partisan and make us want to be either democrats or aristocrats.

And Tocqueville doesn't quite follow that. He uses this same idea of making you into a political scientist and one who actually has to face concrete practical choices as to how you would legislate, say, for a democracy if that were your situation, or just legislate within one. So he makes you into a politician. But he says, as against Aristotle, that the mixed regime is a chimera, a fantastic possibility, which could never exist in reality. I'm not – by that way, that might not be so far from what Aristotle thinks. But Tocqueville doesn't get you in the mood of trying to mix democracy and aristocracy, except, you could say, on the sly or gradually.

One of the great themes of *Democracy in America* is the difference between democracy and aristocracy that's introduced right away in the introduction and he comes back to it very, very frequently. I don't know how many times. But yeah, again and again he makes you see better what democracy is through comparison to this or contrast to this preceding regime. Two wholes, it seems that human beings have lived in either one whole or another whole and one is called democracy, and the other aristocracy.

Democracy means everybody is equal or regards himself as equal. Such is the power of ideas. If we're not exactly equal, we can regard each other as equal. Whereas aristocracy, the few are better. The few are better than the many, and that's a kind of necessary truth. Of course, he doesn't apply it so much, the notion of aristocracy to the sort of literal definition of aristocracy as Aristotle does, rule of the best. But Tocqueville speaks more of land and aristocracy, which is fixed and familial. This is how aristocracy was in practice, in action in France, in early Europe. So and indeed everywhere else prior to modern democracy. So that's how he presents it as aristocracy, therefore as more of an imposition of the few on the many than as a natural title to rule.

But still there are wonderful things about an aristocracy, its pride, its taste for luxury, its love of greatness, its sublime reasonings and its literature, philosophy. So you could say the highest and noblest things in humanity have to do with aristocracy, according to Tocqueville. So that tells you right away that democracy is going to want to borrow some of those things or to enjoy them in some way.

And he shows how politically democracy borrows from aristocracy. He says that rights, which are so important in our democracy, were originally aristocratic. They weren't thought up by John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. Those names are not mentioned, but rather by nobles and nobles didn't just think of rights, they actually stood up for them. So that's important that rights aren't rights unless you claim them. And the nobles stood up for their rights against the king or the monarchy. And that gave a beautiful example of liberty, political liberty in action, which Tocqueville wants us to remember and think about.

So rights have a source in English history. The Magna Carta, we used to learn that in grade school. I'm not sure whether we do anymore. Magna Carta, that's nobles standing up against King John. I remember. And then another example is the jury. And in aristocracy, the jury is a jury of your peers, meaning if you're a noble, you're tried by other nobles. So we pick that up and we democratize it, the same as we did with rights. And we make it an experience, kind of a random experience it is now, not very frequent, for a citizen, for a democratic citizen judging his fellows.

But this comes out of aristocracy. And it teaches you something. He says being on a jury is being part of a great, free school. And what I think it teaches you is that it isn't so easy just to pass a law. In a democracy, when something bad happens – a shooting – our immediate reaction is there ought to be a law, there ought to be a law against that, as if laws could answer every ill that arises. And if you're on a jury, you look at a law and you actually have to apply one to a human being or a group of human beings who are going to go to jail according to how you decide. So it's a serious thing, the responsibility that's put in your hands. And just applying a law is much too mechanical, and you see that law in different circumstances can be just and unjust. And yet it's your job to uphold the law, not your private sense of justice. So that brings a kind of thought, a kind of turmoil of thinking which I think is still to be found in a democratic jury. So that's another example of aristocracy in democracy.

## II: Individualism and Associations (20:08 – 33:12)

KRISTOL: And he explicitly, I think, says the associations, which are so important to preserve liberty, are sort of a democratic equivalent of, or not based on exactly, but the noble who had the power to stand up to the state. And so he spends a lot of time telling you not to yearn, not to be nostalgic for aristocracy and then a lot of time, you know –

MANSFIELD: Showing his nostalgia for aristocracy or his appreciation.

KRISTOL: Right, and how to adapt or adopt aristocratic modes in a certain way in a democratic society.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. One could say more about associations.

KRISTOL: Yeah. So what is the great threat of democracy, I guess, is democratic despotism, that's his – right, tyranny of the majority and all that. That's his – he's famous for that.

MANSFIELD: Right. Well –

KRISTOL: We probably take that too much for granted that – that we would understand that that's a threat, since that's not natural to democracy, I suppose, to assume that democracy can go wrong by being –

MANSFIELD: It's not – yes.

KRISTOL: Too democratic, so to speak.

MANSFIELD: It's really not natural to any system of government to think that it can go wrong. But it happens.

KRISTOL: Or go wrong eternally, I mean go wrong, not by in a position from outside but by the working of its own project, I guess.

MANSFIELD: Associations, one might say a little more. That is because democracy has the effect of individualizing. If you're all equal, then there's no one among you who has any more authority than any other person. So you're all—you're deprived of somebody to look up to or some principle even to look up to because the principle just reinforces your right to live the way your own reason tells you you ought to live. So democracy individualizes.

But as an individual, you're weak, you can't accomplish anything. You're out there in the frontier, you build a house, other people come around you and build houses. You want to communicate with them, it's helpful. You want to be together. So somebody, you have to build a road. You can't do that by yourself. So people come together and they'll form an organization. This is how Tocqueville describes the origin of the township. His famous discussion of the township in the first volume of *Democracy in America*.

So association requires some kind of formal organization, often with officers. When you have officers, you have inequalities, you have people who can boss you around or at least strongly suggest that you do certain things. And you begin to see that obeying is part of being free. If the obedience is within certain formal limits and you see the importance of forums and organizations, forums have to do – are also almost as important as associations for Tocqueville. In fact, you could say they go together. And that's true, just as you said, that in an aristocracy, the associations are there ready-made, the feudal lord and his serfs are sort of one big family. You don't have that in a democracy, there's nobody in charge, there's nobody to look up to so you have to bring it together.

And so even today I think Americans continue to excel in the making of associations. In universities, this is an observation I've made when I go to a European university, on the billboards, there's no student organizations advertising their meetings or talks or activities. There might be a lecture but that's sponsored by the university. Whereas in America, in my place, Harvard has 200, 250 student organizations, which have this life of four years because they're often made by someone when he's a freshman who then leaves after four years, because somebody else wants the honor of being the founder of a new association. And so this continues. And that's a good thing, that gives a kind of fresh, freshness of activity, a certain restlessness that is characteristic of democracy, allows people to rise and fall, allows people to express and satisfy their ambition and also to learn the experience of losing.

So all this is part of a – and makes, or you could say, is intended to make, according to Tocqueville, democratic citizens into sort of the equivalent of a feudal noble standing up for his liberty. And so it's been – yeah, it's been, it's the same idea but it's been democratized. Now how does – now when – what democratic despotism is, and this we see in Volume Two, is a situation when these associations begin to decay and when citizens to rely on their own doing, their own activities and don't think, "This is my political liberty I have, it's for me to do and for me and my friends and my associates." But rather "I'm just going to accept the benefits of democratic government and get a check in the mail and not do anything myself, not even perhaps take the trouble to vote in sort of half gratitude for the favors I've received."

So that – so that together with the notion of rational administration leads to a great movement towards centralization in democracy in the administrations of democracy and also the policies. More and more things come to be decided by the central government, more and more policies come to be made and this gradually saps the spiritedness and the sometimes contrary intractability of a solid democratic citizen and turns him into a herd. Tocqueville even uses that word that sort of to anticipate nature that democracy's democratic man is a herd animal. Tocqueville saw that coming already or that danger.

KRISTOL: Yeah, he seems so struck by the danger of, like, individualism leading to a feeling of helplessness and the passivity and sort of the government takes more – there's more passivity. I mean that seems to have been, I guess that's the core of his –

MANSFIELD: Of his fear.

KRISTOL: Fear, is that right?

MANSFIELD: Yeah I think so. It's mild despotism. It's not harsh. It's not oppressive. It's even beneficial, and it's done benevolently though often very clumsily. And this was, he said, a characteristic of the French bureaucracy under the old regime, it too was clumsy.

But so we still see that today but it's – but that doesn't become a reason for rejecting it. If you've lost your appetite for ruling yourself – ruling yourself, that's what freedom requires. And so I think that's really important.

Now, on the other hand, there was a harsh majority tyranny that Tocqueville talks about and that's the tyranny of the majority. That's a phrase he uses in the first volume and doesn't use in the second volume. And the phrase that he uses in the second volume, sort of mild despotism, he doesn't use in the first. So the first volume of *Democracy in America* was published in 1835 and the second, five years later, 1840. And so scholars worry that there's a huge difference or that there is a lack of continuity in the two, despite Tocqueville's words to the contrary.

But there's obviously some difference in the two. At any rate, you could say that in the first volume, he discusses harsh tyranny. He gives examples of lynching and of a journalist in Philadelphia and also the denial of voting rights to freed blacks. I mean, they had the rights but when they came to the polls, they weren't allowed to vote. And then of course, he tells of the very harsh tyranny of our democracy against the black slaves and the Indians who were dispossessed of their lands and many of them killed.

KRISTOL: I guess that's right, that's the concluding chapters.

MANSFIELD: It is in the first volume.

KRISTOL: Of the first volume, it doesn't exactly end on an upbeat note. I mean, three races in America is not a happy picture, really, which is interesting to teach, and it's a long chapter.

MANSFIELD: It is, a hundred pages. It's the only chapter that has its own outline. And yeah, it covers not just the three races but America's future. And actually at the very end of Volume One, he has this confrontation between America and Russia of the two democratic destinies. You wouldn't think of Czarist Russia as a democracy but he does because he sees that the Czar has followed the same policy. He's a despot and he's equalized everybody underneath him. So despotism and the worst kind of democracy have the same policy of equalizing, leveling down in the case of despotism but leveling up in the better case of democracy if it's aware of itself.

KRISTOL: Yeah, being aware of itself, that seems to be a good way of describing what Tocqueville tries to have his readers – I guess the normal account is that he writes for these French aristocrats but he surely is writing for American and other democrats as well, right? I mean –

MANSFIELD: Yes, I would say definitely, yeah.

KRISTOL: To educate them. And the first volume is more political, I guess, and the second more on society. Isn't that the normal –

MANSFIELD: Yes, that's right. That's what he says. It's more on laws and institutions, the first volume. And the second volume is more on mores, sentiments, thoughts, or, as he says, civil society, a phrase that he was partly responsible for inventing. Yeah. So and we still talk about the necessity of keeping a healthy civil society, as, for example, associations. So you have my colleague, Robert Putnam and his book *Bowling Alone*. He's worried that bowling or bowling groups or associations aren't in vogue anymore but people are bowling alone. So that's an example of the importance of associations as understood today by a political sociologist.

KRISTOL: But being a good moderate liberal, as I suppose he is, he doesn't really want to tie that into, as much as others might, to the rise of big government and so forth, right.

MANSFIELD: I would suspect so, yes. But he's my colleague.

KRISTOL: No, I respect him. But Tocqueville does stress that connection, I think. I mean he's so strong for decentralization and for erring on the side of citizen self-government as opposed to –

MANSFIELD: That's right, many elections.

KRISTOL: The nanny state, you know.

MANSFIELD: That's right.

KRISTOL: That part, I think, is striking.

### **III: Who was Tocqueville? (33:12 – 43:46)**

KRISTOL: I remember when I first read Tocqueville and I was struck by what a wise and judicious observer of democracy and of not just democracy but of human beings he was. And then I was so

surprised when I discovered that he was 25 or something like that, 26 when he came to America and 30 when the first volume was published and 35, I guess, when the second volume was published.

MANSFIELD: It's astonishing. He was born in 1805 and died in 1859. He lived not a long life, and it was sickly. He died of tuberculosis, and I guess he had that through most of his adult life, suffered from it. But he comes from Normandy. His name is Alexis de Tocqueville, the de means – says he's from Tocqueville. So his was an ancient family, the Clérel family, a Norman family and has got a chateau there, and you can still it today, you can visit it. There's a Count and Countess of Tocqueville living in it at present. So he goes on.

KRISTOL: They're not his heirs, right?

MANSFIELD: They're not his heirs because he never had children. That was either not a loss, according to him, or perhaps it was. He once spoke of having children as running a lottery, you don't know what you're going to get. And he wasn't sure that he was going to make that bet. Or but there were other expressions of sorrow that he never had children.

Anyway, so he was an aristocrat, and his father lived through the French Revolution just barely. He was imprisoned, was scheduled to be guillotined, and was let off the guillotining, I guess, of Robespierre. So and they just stopped in time and he came out of jail, he was 22 years old at the time, his hair having turned white with terror.

So Tocqueville is therefore well-placed to see the difference between the old regime of aristocracy and the new regime of democracy. And this sets him up ideally for the contrast that he presents so often between democracy and aristocracy in his writings and especially in this book, *Democracy in America*. So he came, he learned some law, served as a judge for four years living in Versailles, started off as a judge at age 23, and then he came to America with a project. I guess he got a grant with a project for a study of the penitentiary system in America, the new ways of treating criminals, which – but he came here and stayed for nine months, traveled around the whole country as it was then, including going to the frontier, which was Michigan at that time. Went to Quebec to see how the French were doing. Went down the Mississippi. Slept in a log cabin and rode in a steamboat. Went down the Mississippi to New Orleans and then came up through the South. So he saw both the slave states and the free states. And then left from New York nine months later, that was in 1832. Then he produced this book 1835, the first volume. So he was 30 years old then.

KRISTOL: And it was famous.

MANSFIELD: Yes, it became famous immediately, it was a great hit, best seller. And he was immediately taken into the French Academy, which is a considerable honor, especially for someone so young.

KRISTOL: It strikes me – I never really thought about this. I mean, it doesn't seem to me – at the time it would have been an obvious thing to go to America. I don't know that that many other, later on, people did it a lot, Dickens and Price and all these people would come to America to see it. But that's when America is 20, 30, 40 years further on and –

MANSFIELD: Yes, that's true but his kinsmen and relations at Chateaubriand, René de Chateaubriand came to America and gave a very different picture.

KRISTOL: Yeah. But for Tocqueville to see, this is where he would see the future somewhat cuts against the French pride in their own revolution, which they must have thought, which they thought dwarfed in significance that puny American Revolution, right? I mean, the historical events were in France, not in America.



MANSFIELD: It's true. But Chateaubriand was coming to America to get away from the French Revolution, and he just came here to see how European civilization could survive in the barbarism of the wild. So whereas Tocqueville came here to see what was the future of Europe. Europe's future was here. America was ahead of Europe. That's the message that he sends. So I think that is really striking.

Yeah, so that's a little bit of his biography and then he came back and actually ran for office, and several times was a member of the Constituent Assembly that produced the Constitution of the Second Republic. And then he was actually a Minister of Foreign Affairs for a few months. And he was ousted in a series of events which finally ended in the coming of Louis, Louis Napoleon in 1851. And Tocqueville then, which Tocqueville regarded as a disaster for France, this kind of bureaucratic Napoleon. Napoleon, among other things, was not only the master of an empire but the creator of bureaucracy, of the great schools of France where the bureaucrats all get their education still now.

So, and then so he used this time, the rest of his life really, to work on, from 1852 on, to work on *The Old Regime*. And sort of on the sly, secretly, a book called *The Souvenirs, or Recollections*, a book of memoirs. It was just a brilliant treatment of individuals that he knew and that he met in his friendships but also in his politics or his political activity.

His other books don't treat of individuals. That's a kind of interesting fact about them. So the Founders of America are treated as a group. And so, well, George Washington is quoted. People, individuals are quoted, but George Washington is quoted to show what the American policy could have been and toward the Indians but wasn't. A noble and beneficial policy. So yeah, so it's only in this secret book, which he required not to be published. So it was only published in the 1930s, very much later. And people became aware of this. It contains sketches, brilliant sketches of people he knew.

KRISTOL: Not all of whom he thought so well of.

MANSFIELD: No. Almost none of whom he thought so well of, especially those in politics. He spoke of seeing people whose everyday, whose names and faces he couldn't remember except that he had seen them before. They must have names, he says, but I can't remember them, they bore me profoundly. That is not the statement of the usual politician. Yeah. And probably indicates why he was not that successful.

KRISTOL: But he somehow thought it was important to go into politics or useful –

MANSFIELD: He did, yeah.

KRISTOL: To contribute or to learn something, or both, I suppose.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. In *The Souvenirs*, he gives an example of a crucial situation where he saw what was necessary to do but wasn't able to do it himself. So it was a kind of chance defeat of a good policy or a good result for the French people, French politics. And so yeah, you get an impression of the importance of chance looking at that memoirs. It's not forgotten, though, in the other books. He wants to remind us, yeah, the limits of control, of human pride and of human accomplishment.

By the way, there's a remark he makes in *Democracy in America* about how in democracy you have to rise through stages. And to do this takes a long time, whereas in aristocracy, you can become great when you're young as Pascal became a philosopher when he was the same age as Tocqueville. See, but Tocqueville, if he'd been here in America, he would have had to get a Ph.D., be an assistant professor and that kind of thing, rise from the ranks, as we say.

KRISTOL: And even in politics in America – well, we have some young people but not quite as much as we think – it's young for John Kennedy is 43 or whatever but Pitt the Younger was, what I don't know –

MANSFIELD: He was 24 when –

KRISTOL: Twenty-four when he was Prime Minister.

MANSFIELD: Prime Minister, yes.

KRISTOL: And a pretty great Prime Minister.

MANSFIELD: And 23 when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. Yes, those are possibilities under aristocracy.

#### **IV: “Liberalism with a Soul” (43:46 – 1:12:25)**

KRISTOL: And Tocqueville, I’m struck that we tend to take him today as a warning against the problems of democracy, which he certainly does and suggesting various mitigating things one could do and even – solutions is probably too strong. But he also – but it’s not just, you know, not avoiding democratic despotism. I’m always struck by that when I reread Tocqueville and there’s a kind of hope for something greater, at least sometimes in his writing.

MANSFIELD: For sure, yeah. And *Democracy in America* ends with a kind of exhortation to what he calls the true friends of liberty and human greatness. So that those two things are connected, liberty and human greatness.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Why don’t you explain that?

MANSFIELD: That already tells you that there’s something aristocratic about liberty. When your liberty, you’re free to show yourself or to show your merit and that means free to create an inequality and if you’re in a free society, that’s a society of inequalities tolerated or even admired inequalities.

So but human greatness is also possible under democracy because as with other aristocratic things, it gets democratized. So we have our love of public monuments, he says, in democracies, there are huge public monuments and small individual houses and not much in between. I don’t know if that’s still the case. But we’re very proud of our monuments. For example, Washington, which is an artificial city, which consists of monuments, especially at the beginning and not many inhabitants but it had a kind of American greatness. It showed what we wanted to do with ourselves. Just on the first page of *The Federalist*, which you mentioned a while ago, that America is to be an experiment for all of mankind. We’re taking on a big responsibility, and so each one of us sort of feels this pride but also a sincere desire to benefit others. You know, come live with us. So that’s a typical American tourist, yeah. Come over and see, you’ll see how great it is. Yeah. And I had said to people who’ve been living where they are for centuries as if such blandishments could be effective.

But that’s still our democratic greatness, so we want to set an example for all of mankind of a republic that works. And that’s in *The Federalist* and Tocqueville picks up on that. There are about a dozen references to *The Federalist* in *Democracy in America*. And so he had an opinion of that book. Yeah.

So he picks up on this desire to improve mankind. But it’s also much more mundane, too. When you are free, are – you look around for something to occupy your attention and the most immediate objects are material things or material goods. So democracy is characterized by material, love of material enjoyments or material well-being. It’s not so much capitalism that causes this, according to Tocqueville, it’s not our economic system but it’s our political system. He makes a remark about elections that we’re not – we don’t have elections because we’re prosperous but we’re prosperous because we have elections. So the prosperity of the activity, the economic activity that makes us prosperous is shown or is given its – is confirmed and nourished and founded in our political activity and the large number of elections that we have. So that is a good thing but it’s also a bad thing, because material enjoyments are petty and limited and competitive. The competition part is not so bad because that makes it spirited and

dissatisfied. But if you live a life of material enjoyments, at the end of it, you look around and are dissatisfied with all the things you didn't do or couldn't have done or wished you had done. So it makes you wonder whether that was enough.

So in the human being, in the nature of the human being, Tocqueville says to have a love or a taste for what is infinite and immortal. And democracies don't really live in accordance with this but they show this and they show this so we show – you can show your freedom most by keeping yourself from the enslavement of material goods or money. We're all aware of that, even though we don't live that way, we wished we lived that way. And that already is something. But the greatness comes from the ability to show or exhibit our political liberty through associating and through participating in politics, thinking about politics and making this a successful republic.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I mean he stresses self-interest well-understood so famously and does stress it. Yet on the one hand, one has to acknowledge, I guess, interest and he doesn't resort to a kind of idealism to try to elevate people above material interests but he's very worried about material – materialism is a great danger.

MANSFIELD: Right. Not a moral exhortation against material goods. And he describes what he calls the American doctrine of self-interest well-understood. I don't think he subscribes to it but he describes it and that – yeah, that, we don't like to think of ourselves as virtuous so we refashion our virtues as “just anyone would have done that” or “it was in my interest to do that” and I didn't – sorry, I didn't mean to be virtuous, if I was accidentally.

You know, so we don't give ourselves credit sufficiently for our decency or for our good motives, for our virtues so that there's a suggestion there that perhaps we might do so a little more. And that sort of, that's also the context for his remark about pride that he would trade this in any number of small virtues, small virtues for the vice of pride. As a virtue, Americans need to take more pride in what they do. If they did, then they wouldn't be so attached to material goods because – well, even so, you obviously can take pride in material goods. The cars you own, that kind of thing.

KRISTOL: But presumably even that pride might lead you beyond.

MANSFIELD: Yeah, it does, yeah.

KRISTOL: The mere material goods.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. Makes it into a hobby or even an enthusiasm, something you know about. You become, you become knowing and knowledgeable in that sort of thing. So that's already – that's already better than the mere desire to have a car. Yeah. Useful as they are.

KRISTOL: And the pride is connected to – what is it called – a new kind of liberal, liberalism?

MANSFIELD: Yeah, yes, yeah. He uses that phrase in a letter when he was very young. Yes, I'm a liberal but a new kind of liberal. So it will be interesting to try to figure out what that new kind of liberal is. It's just like his new political science, he doesn't define that.

And what, I think, it is is an improvement on the liberalism of the 17th century, of the 17th-century English philosophers who founded liberalism, Hobbes and Locke and Spinoza and others, but those mainly. And they founded their liberalism on the state of nature, on a state, which – in which people live without government, without civilization, without any of the advantages or benefits of society as individuals. Sort of as – and Hobbes' famous description of the state of nature is a war of all against all.

So when you're all individualized like that and you can't count on anybody but yourself, there's no trust, there's no virtue, there's no society. If you say that's the beginning, then that's the zero-beginning that I

think Tocqueville wants to avoid because that makes politics into something questionable in itself. It suggests that your real nature is not political but is to be an individual out for himself. And that can't help but have bad effects on morals and mores of democracy, once it's founded.

KRISTOL: And the virtues are undercut, right, almost explicitly by Hobbes, I guess.

MANSFIELD: Yes and pride is submitted to – made to submit to fear. Your fear is more rational than your pride, according to Hobbes. That's sometimes true but maybe not entirely true. So Tocqueville opposes that. He never refers to a state of nature or some kind of beginning foundation of that type which wants to construct a government and society from the beginning, from a beginning in which it doesn't exist. So he always presumes that society and politics are presently existing and you have to work from that.

And so but political liberty therefore must – however can be understood as something natural because if you say politics is not natural, then political liberty seems to be something artificial or unnecessary or even impossible. If you begin from total liberty in a state of nature, it doesn't seem that you can reach a moderate or political liberty by liberal means. So Hobbes and Locke both resort to fear or some kind of pressure of necessity which makes us join a political association. And that means then that you become free through unfree means. Whereas Tocqueville says that you won't get freedom that way, what you'll get is people looking for government to benefit them because they'll think of themselves as necessarily selfish and necessarily weak, not being able to do anything on their own.

So Tocqueville wants to show Americans that they can do something on their own. In fact, they are doing something on their own. And so and therefore his argument is not fantastic or imaginary but based on the facts of American life and so when you show the American people what they're doing and they're making, they're living in towns and they're governing themselves. To govern yourself you must make your – you must be above yourself in some sense and that means you must have something like a soul. A soul is what enables you to rise above yourself or your necessities and to make a choice. Without a soul, how can you make a choice?

So Tocqueville's liberalism is liberalism with a soul; that's the new kind of liberalism I think that – whereas Hobbes and Locke were great critics of the soul because they thought that once you've got a soul, you think too much of yourself and you begin to think of God and who will ensure that your soul is going to be immortal. And this leads to too much power in the Church and superstition and oppression. Whereas, Tocqueville, no. Christianity is a positive influence. He says that men never appreciated their natural equality until Christ came to us. So it was already a natural fact, he says in that. But it took Christ, Christianity to make us appreciate – appreciate this natural fact.

KRISTOL: And I suppose one – I'm just thinking out loud – that one could say that in the 17th century it was necessary in some sense for Hobbes and Locke to launch such a frontal assault on pride, the soul, all these pretensions to do away with what they thought had to be done away with, which was the ability of Christianity to use that rhetoric and that way of thinking to dominate politics and to dominate people and give priests all this power. And Tocqueville, in a way, in the 19th century, doesn't have to litigate that anymore, so to speak. And –

MANSFIELD: But he does have to deal with the baleful influence of those who made that change or who thought they had to make that change.

KRISTOL: Of Hobbes and Locke, yes, so he has to modify them back towards –

MANSFIELD: Yeah, very much, yeah.

KRISTOL: And he talks explicitly about bringing together – doesn't he? – the – what's it called? – the liberty and religion, the passion of liberty and the passion – no, the spirit, the spirit of religion, I think. We should befriend, the friends of liberty –

MANSFIELD: Yeah. There's a taste for liberty, there's a passion for inequality, a taste for liberty, and a spirit for religion.

KRISTOL: But the friends of liberty should be – should probably be more with the friends of religion.

MANSFIELD: Yes, yeah, yeah. He says – he indicates that already in the introduction to *Democracy in America*. But all the way through. And another point is, too, that he gives credit to the Puritans for bringing democracy to America but they were a theocracy, they believed that they were directly governing under the command of God. So that part had to be changed. So to make an alliance between religion and liberty, it was necessary to make a distinction between church and state. And so that part of the 17th-century liberalism Tocqueville accepts and indeed improves. And he says the Catholic clergy in America believe in this distinction of church and state.

But yes, Christianity when it meddles in politics loses its moral and religious purity because it develops interests of its own and becomes partisan as the French Church did when it became, when it really fought the Revolution or suffered under the Revolution in alliance with the monarchy and the nobles, throne and altar. So that had to be – that had to be changed but so he – but paradoxically you see religion will have more political influence if it doesn't try to exercise it because its political influence comes from its morals but its morals, in order to be influential, have to be pure so that priests cannot be accused of seeing no evil as Machiavelli did. So once the Church gets itself off by itself, then it has more influence than if it were to try to take partisan stands or enter directly into politics. So, under those conditions, religion and liberty can make an alliance instead of being apart or indeed in a conflict as they had been for the previous century or two.

KRISTOL: Yeah and I suppose that's more, that's newer than – I mean, now almost 200 years later, one is used to a lot of people saying religion and liberty can go together, should go together, do go together, politicians routinely appeal to such things. But I'm not sure maybe when Tocqueville was writing, that was more especially in France, that was, I suppose, more of an innovation, so to speak.

I'm struck listening to you discuss Tocqueville. You did early much – earlier but throughout your career, you worked on Burke, another great – Edmund Burke, another – someone who writes somewhat in the spirit of Tocqueville perhaps, but let's say that people today who admire Tocqueville often admire Burke and vice versa. They both –

MANSFIELD: I do, I do for example. Yes.

KRISTOL: Liberal conservatives or conservative liberals, or something like that. But actually they're so quite different when you think about it, right, I mean I would say. Does Tocqueville really refer to Burke or does he seem to have –

MANSFIELD: Well, yes, in *The Old Regime*, he has a long critique of Burke's understanding of the French Revolution, as Burke really comes to the support of the French nobility in a way that Tocqueville does not. So –

KRISTOL: So say a word about sort of Burkean conservatism versus Tocquevillean conservatism, if that's the right way to say it. Since I think, I do think if you talk to intelligent American or European conservatives today, those two are probably two of the thinkers they would most look to for guidance but the guidance maybe, is somewhat, cuts in slightly different directions.

MANSFIELD: So, yeah, Burke died in 1797, and Tocqueville published this book in 1835.

KRISTOL: So two generations later.

MANSFIELD: Yeah, right. So and the big difference is democracy. So Burke did not live under democracy or under the promise of democracy or in any way under the authority of democracy, at least in England, although he saw many English radicals, sort of democratic radicals. Nonetheless, he was able to suppose that some kind of aristocratic or mixed monarchy with popular elections, a mixed regime was possible. And Tocqueville does not. So I think that's a big political difference between them and therefore between the conservatism that comes out of them.

KRISTOL: Less nostalgia in Tocqueville, certainly. That's probably unfair to criticize Burke – Burkeans tend to become nostalgic in a way that Tocquevilleans don't, I think.

MANSFIELD: I think that's right, I think that's right. Tocqueville, for example, makes his peace with progress, with a liberal notion of progress. He certainly criticizes it, he points out very sharply, keenly that there isn't any definition of progress that the liberals have, that what they're going after is not perfection but perfectibility as if you could go on perfecting yourself without ever succeeding or ever coming to a stop. So it's that kind of fundamental irrationality at the heart of liberal progress. Nonetheless, he sees the importance of it in America in a way that I think Burke would want to deny.

They're both wonderful stylists. If you want to learn French, read Tocqueville. And English, read Burke, and you can learn. They both have wonderful observations, insights, formulations, both are imminently quotable in many situations.

So but Tocqueville did criticize Burke's understanding of the history of the French monarchy. He says that the – Tocqueville says that the French monarchy was already democratized by the time the revolution had occurred so that this was not a fundamental break at the time but rather just a culmination of a process of rationalization or rational administration that the monarchy had given itself over to that would gradually make the people want to rebel against the irrationality of government by a single hereditary ruler.

KRISTOL: And say a word about another Englishman whom Tocqueville knew and I think helped to publicize Tocqueville quite a lot, which is Mill, another great liberal and still read, still appealed to.

MANSFIELD: Yes, right. Mill is to liberals as Burke is to conservatives. So Mill and Tocqueville both obviously share democracy and, but somewhat differently. Mill still wants to do away with aristocratic leftovers in English life and politics that he sees. So he's in favor of increasingly democratic policy, which he ended up espousing socialism at the end of his life. So which Tocqueville totally rejected in his private book, *The Souvenirs*.

So but also Mill had much greater reliance on the possibility of rational administration or rational – a rational policy of that would be effected by the people today called intellectuals. So he – Mill is a favorite today of intellectuals, and he would have liked them too. So I think that would be a mutual admiration society, whereas Tocqueville had no liking whatsoever for democratic intellectuals; he thought that they were trouble, they were mischief, they took the democratic principle and tried to make everything even more democratic than it already is. He believed that to be mistaken, you shouldn't nourish the errors of democracy. First, you need to identify them, and then you need to work against them carefully and not necessarily by confrontation, in fact, usually not but by pointing out what's missing.

KRISTOL: Yeah, the two strands in America or I guess in the Anglo tradition do seem to be the Burkean and the Millian, and Tocqueville seems maybe a little deeper. Deeper maybe is not fair but to have sort of not the fault of maybe the errors of either or the limitations of either.

MANSFIELD: You could say that, I think, yeah.

KRISTOL: Though Mill wrote a very generous review of Tocqueville.

MANSFIELD: Yes, right, he did.

KRISTOL: Yeah, so he appreciated –

MANSFIELD: Yes he did and he wrote them in a conciliatory letter after the second volume come out – came out and it wasn't such a success as the first. So he said, "Don't worry, you're still a wonderful thinker, and I'm pleased to have you." Yeah, and he invited him to write a – write for his magazine, for Mill's magazine.

KRISTOL: It's funny that the first was such a – I mean, who knows why these things happen? I'm sure there's a lot of chance, but that the first was such a huge success more than the second because I would say – and you've taught Tocqueville many more times than I have, I've only done it a little bit in sort of the side in summer programs. So I think students today are much more taken with the second volume than the first. And I would say I personally am too because of these fantastic short chapters with these insights and it turns out to be more connected than it seems on the surface. But they really speak to one's experience of living in a modern democracy, whereas the first is a little bit –

MANSFIELD: Thrilling to read – at first you learn all these facts you didn't necessarily want to know.

KRISTOL: Right, right. The Constitution and so forth, whereas the second is –

MANSFIELD: Sort of formalities.

KRISTOL: But maybe the second hit too close to home. Why was the second not well received? I wonder if it was just too –

MANSFIELD: I think they thought it was more theoretical and he does say that and his first volume is more about America and the second is more about democracy. Together, *Democracy in America*.

KRISTOL: Absolutely. Well, thank you for teaching us about Tocqueville and about *Democracy in America*. And thank you for joining us again on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]