

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

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Guest: Arthur C. Brooks, American Enterprise Institute

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I: What does AEI Do? (00:15 – 14:16)

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. My guest today is Arthur Brooks, the President of the American Enterprise Institute, the best think tank in Washington.

BROOKS: Or the world, depending on your point of view.

KRISTOL: Good point. I agree with that. Let's talk about that. What does it mean to be president of a think tank? What do you do every day, and what does a think tank do every day?

BROOKS: I ask myself that question a lot. A lot of times sitting in planes. It's actually changed a lot.

By the way, thank you for having me on this terrific series. I know the audience is expanding. The best commentary about the intellectual firmament of the right that's actually on the Web today – so congratulations.

KRISTOL: Thank you.

BROOKS: Running a think tank has changed a lot certainly over the past few decades, but even as I've taken over seven years ago at AEI. In the 70s and 80s, when think tanks were in their heyday, there was a time of effectively building something and letting people come to it. And the reason that conservative think tanks were important was because people realized that universities simply weren't going to produce the ideas that represented a conservative point of view, which was a mainstream point of view.

Think tanks would do these things, and lawmakers would come to the think tanks, and intellectuals would come to think tanks, and by about the 90s, people were realizing that that wasn't happening quite as much and the search for relevance started to happen.

So the result has been – we knew what think tanks were in the 70s and 80s, and today it sort of means everything and nothing, so you find some that are advocacy organizations, some are quasi-lobbying organizations and some like AEI have tried to stay true to the more academic context that was our nature for decades and decades.

KRISTOL: What was that? How does it work? I mean, people are in this building – we're filming this in the current American Enterprise's building; you're moving into a new one in a few months.

So you recruit scholars, do you tell them what to work on? They work on what they want to work on? How do they interact with Congressmen, Senators, the Executive branch? What does it sort of – what's a day in the life of AEI?

BROOKS: AEI is 225 full-time people so it's a lot of people and it's grown a lot. It's about doubled in size over the past seven years. Which is good but it's difficult. We hire scholars in particular areas so we don't hire some scholars and say, "Just be smart in absolutely everything." That would be impractical given how much knowledge you have to have to be an expert at this point.

We have our economists, foreign policy people, health, education. We're a full-spectrum think tank. We hire people and say, "You set your research agenda. The important thing is to be right, be smart, and work for the fundamental values of our institution and for the betterment of the nation and the world."

What are the values that we have? Basically, we have two institutional values. Human dignity and human potential. We believe there is sort of a natural right that people have that is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence but also the natural rights of men that people should pursue their happiness, and that dignity is something everybody should get and that depends a lot on culture and it depends even on public policy.

The other issue in progress, we believe that potential is something that people can attain. We're not European conservatives who believe that we should just conserve things the way that they were – bring back the king. We're a little – we have a touch of this utopian spirit of believing that things can get better and there is a true north in the improvement of the individual.

And that comes from this concept that drives us, that makes us such optimists in the conservative American movement that you've been part of for such a long time. That we came here – your family, I'm going to guess that your grandparents came here running for their lives.

KRISTOL: Correct. More or less.

BROOKS: And mine came here with a first-grade education, orphans, dirt-poor, not speaking a word of English and simply wanting to start a farm. The truth is, you and I are nothing more than riffraff. At least one generation removed from it, with one direction to go and that's up.

Remembering that is what's sets us apart from all of the conservative movements around the world and certainly from the liberal movement in this country. That we believe that people can improve. But you have to remember certain truths and you have to uphold certain things that are good and true and moral and right.

That also requires a conservative intellectual movement that helps us to understand how culture and policy can be propelled forward. That's how we think of ourselves. So experts – true experts who are on the level of the best university professors – that are dedicated to the ideas of freedom, and opportunity and enterprise and human betterment and flourishing working together for a better world.

KRISTOL: I think people would be surprised hearing this by sort of how ambitious, big the underlying idea of AEI. As people look at the think tanks, my sense is they see the healthcare experts, unemployment insurance experts, and the foreign policy experts of different regions. Has AEI always had sort of this bigger vision?

You mentioned the history – let's go back a little bit to the history of the people – I'd be interested. I should know more about this, but probably don't. It was founded, what, in the 1930s?

BROOKS: 1938 by businessmen from, largely members of the National Association of Manufacturers, who were the great men of the American economy at the time. What was going on, the context that started AEI was pretty bold. It's sort of what we're talking about here about thriving and flourishing. In 1938, the ninth year of the Great Depression, America was in minus four percent economic growth.

KRISTOL: Despite the New Deal and Franklin Roosevelt's allegedly successful policies.

BROOKS: Because of the New Deal and because of bad Fed policy. That was the idea that – our founders were not intellectuals, they were not university men, they were businessmen – and they believed that this idea of scientific socialism that was around all of the greatest economists at the time at American universities, this pervasive left-wing thinking, was wrong. That what you needed was not less free enterprise but more free enterprise, pushed all the way to the bottom so ordinary people could build their own lives.

KRISTOL: I didn't realize that. Sort of as an alternative of what was dominant at the universities – even back then?

BROOKS: It started as a counterpoint to universities and with it an ideal of human flourishing and potential and dignity. That's how it was built. Now, that's great as far as I'm concerned. It was different than any other institution that had ever been built, certainly on the so-called political right and it developed along those lines. Necessarily, it had the stove pipe into certain levels of expertise, or certain areas of expertise.

And so there were economists originally, that was what it was all about. And later in foreign policy and the foreign-policy wing came up because of another ideal, which is we realized – when I say *we*, I say *they*, but the great men and women that build this institution. If you believed in freedom for all Americans to build their lives, and you had the confidence in Americans to want to build their lives, you can't stop at the water's edge. You have to stop just talking about Americans and start talking about all people.

We have a reputation for what is popularly understood as neoconservatism. But neoconservatism at its root is basically just saying what's good is good for everybody. Not everybody all the time, and not everybody at the exact right level to absorb these ideas but freedom is not something that's limited to Americans. And we have to share these ideals. It's important morally to share these ideals, and that's how the foreign-policy wing of AEI started and then it spread to all the areas.

Now, I don't ask that every AEI scholar come to work every day and say, "What am I going to do to save the world? What am I going to do to serve my fellow men and women?" That, of course, lurks in the background, but what AEI scholars are doing is saying, "I'm working on a paper. I'm working on a book. I'm working on a testimony. I'm setting up an event to look at one facet of this and to get that just right, to pursue the truth of this."

Before the political victory by the way. Because truth comes before victory. That's an axiom of the American Enterprise Institute, and it should be of the conservative movement as far as I'm concerned. Together – that comes together kind of as a seamless garment of this human flourishing context that we've tried to use to build the institution.

BROOKS: It seems to me that when my father was here and so many, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Bob Bork, that whole generation.

BROOKS: Your father Irving Kristol, one of the true greats of AEI.

KRISTOL: Thank you. He had a sense though that I don't know if it was easier, it was a little more settled what a think tank did and I think politicians knew what they wouldn't get from visiting a think tank or listening to think-tank scholars. Their work product was more – I don't know, it seems like there was less competition back then.

It does seem like now we're in a very different world. You've obviously thought a lot about that since taking over AEI. How different is the world of politics and, I guess, technology even? What kind of challenge does that pose for you?

BROOKS: What's revolutionized the world of journalism has also perturbed the world of think tanks. So journalists who thought they knew what their business was by the 70s and 80s, realized by the late 90s and early 2000s and even today, realized they don't have the slightest idea what their industry is all

about. That – how can it be that newspapers are shutting down? The answer is that they’ve become less – it’s not that they’ve become less good, they’ve just become less necessary to people.

The same thing has happened all over the idea industries. We are in the idea business, we’re not in the think-tank business per se. There’s not a lot of thinking in tanks. I mean, it was descriptive for a while but we’re really in the idea business and we have to be agnostic with respect to form if we want ideas to propel the society.

And by the way, an early motto of AEI from one of our great founders, Bill Baroody, who was the son of a Lebanese stonecutter and was a true believer of these ideas, said that the competition of ideas is fundamental to a free society. Which in the 50s was utterly subversive. The whole idea of a competition of ideas was wrong because there was an established wisdom, there was a trajectory that inexorably pointed toward scientific public administration and, indeed, scientific social democracy. And we had to go that direction. And it was subversive to say we should have a competition of ideas.

And that competition of ideas is something that we have to remember, and not be stuck on the form, or the expression of those particular ideas, to say, “We write books.” It’s a mistake. I mean, we do in fact write books. Or to say, “We do testimony in television, we do events, we write journal articles, we write op-eds.” These things are all true but they’re going to change. We have to adhere to the power of ideas to propel people in a better direction to build their lives.

Once we understand that then we can see the think-tank industry has fragmented a lot. That the relevance and importance of it has changed according to the form the other ones take, and AEI now is very different than its peers. And they were quite similar as recently as the early 1980s.

KRISTOL: I do think AEI was always more contrarian and countercultural almost than people now think. It became very well-established, and a lot of people there became very well-known and then respected – Herb Stein, Jeane Kirkpatrick, my father, Bob Bork. There was so many and now still – Chris DeMuth.

BROOKS: My predecessor Chris DeMuth who ran the institution for 22 years, really a great intellectual.

KRISTOL: And did a great job. Charles Murray who is still there.

My memory of coming to Washington and visiting a little when I was in grad school and then moving here in the mid-80s, it was always cutting against the grain, including the conservative grain to some degree. Supply-side economics was to some degree born and fostered here, and foreign policy challenges to some of the established conservative views of foreign policy. I think it’s true in a lot of areas. If people sort of think of AEI as a grand old established institution, but I think that’s never quite been the case.

BROOKS: Well, it hasn’t. And it’s an interesting set of reasons for that. I think it’s – sociologically, it’s worth going into. AEI has traditionally been formed of two social groups that are countercultural to the Republican establishment, to the conservative establishment. When you think of the conservative establishment, you think of country clubs and you think of people whose families started with the Mayflower, etc. AEI has traditionally been formed by two groups – Jews and Catholics.

And the conservative intellectual movement has largely been also propelled by Jews and Catholics. Now, Jews and Catholics are thought of as the base of liberalism, but at the highest intellectual levels, you’ll find that people like your dad, who started off on the left but became a real leader on the right in that hothouse of New York –

KRISTOL: Michael Novak, I guess, on the Catholic side.

BROOKS: Exactly right. Michael Novak. But on the right, there was this nucleus of people – Podhoretz, Norman Podhoretz, Irving Kristol, Saul Bellow, who are in this sort of Greenwich Village hothouse that said, “You know what? We’re getting a couple things really wrong on the left. Number one is that the libertinism of the Sexual Revolution on the left is destroying our society, and that foreign policy, which is

becoming increasingly soft on communism, is horrible for people and subjugating them all around the world.”

And they basically rebelled against, not just the excesses but the fundamental inaccuracies of the worldview of the left and created the new right. That’s what you’d expect from intellectuals. So the result of that is that you would see people that started out on the conventional left and reinvented themselves and reinvented a movement on the right, and that’s countercultural to the conservative movement and to the Republican movement in the United States.

You find people who used to be on the left and now are on the right and who are saying basically, “You know what? Everything you think you know is wrong.” And they’re willing, by the way, to point out the inaccuracies on the right as well because of the culture that’s cropped up around this place.

II: From Music to Public Policy (14:16 – 32:59)

KRISTOL: So you came here from a university, and you had been associated with AEI, but you hadn’t been physically here. I guess, what has surprised you the most about AEI, about running a think tank and what’s surprised you the most about the world in which you now live, which is really Washington, DC, to some degree, at least?

BROOKS: AEI was kind an inextricable vortex sucking me in forever. I mean, I came from a relatively liberal, democratic family in Seattle, which tells you nothing because there are about eight Republicans in Seattle. Everybody’s from these families.

But not a very political family, but I thought I knew about politics and just sort of took these things by flavor. And when I started to study, which was very late. I dropped out of college when I was 19 and took a “gap decade,” as my parents called it, because I was playing music. I was playing in the Barcelona Symphony among other places.

When I started to study by correspondence in my late 20s, I didn’t have any brain-washing. I had a stack of books in my dining room table – and my wife who had never lived in the United States, she’s from Barcelona. We were living in Barcelona at the time as a matter of fact and so I basically didn’t take anything as given. There was no, you know, hard-core Commie sociology professor who’s telling me that America’s a source of subjugation of all peoples and all this stuff that people labor under when they go to big American universities.

And so I think it actually helped me a lot. I didn’t have any chains to throw off effectively. I started to question when I was reading the facts on economics, which really influenced me a lot. But also I started to read authors that were writing about public policy, which I found fascinating using these tools. And what I noticed along the way, there were people like Michael Novak and Charles Murray and Irving Kristol and Milton Friedman and I started to – and James Q. Wilson – and I said, “Huh, they have one institution in common, the American Enterprise Institute.”

KRISTOL: Let’s just – I was going to talk about this later – let’s talk about, it’s so intriguing so tell us a little bit about this. You’re in high school, you begin college and you’re in Seattle so you just decide, “Forget it”? What year are we in? We are in 19–

BROOKS: I graduated high school in 1982, which is now a long time ago obviously.

KRISTOL: All your peers are trekking off to college and pursuing –

BROOKS: I grew up in a lower-middle class neighborhood, working-class neighborhood and most of the people I grew up didn’t go to college. Some did and some went to decent places, but a lot of kids didn’t go to college and most of them sort of specialized in getting high.

KRISTOL: Most of them did not go to Barcelona to join a symphony orchestra.

BROOKS: And it turned out getting high is not a good life strategy. Just observing the trajectory of success of a lot of my friends I grew up with.

KRISTOL: Useful advice for our younger viewers.

BROOKS: Those watching us today should keep that in mind. There are other career paths.

And so I was – my parents went to college. My dad actually was a math professor at a liberal arts college in Seattle, which back in the day – this really gives you an idea of how things have changed – it was such a low-paying profession. It was such a lower-middle class profession that he drove a bus during the summers. Can you imagine if here were a tenured college professor that had to drive a bus on the side? It would be a news story. It would be on *Slate* – scandal! But, you know, that was a normal thing.

So they expected me to go to college, my brother went to college, and I went to a place called California Institute of the Arts. All I wanted to do was be a French horn player. That's all I wanted to do. I wanted to play avant-garde music and make my living being a French horn player.

KRISTOL: So you were an avant-garde French horn player, not a classical French horn player?

BROOKS: Well, I was a classical French horn player but I was playing in a lot of new music ensembles and experimenting with experimental jazz, etc. It was a pretty good life although it didn't – more life advice for the young people watching us today. If you want to be successful as a freshman in college, don't drop all your required classes and substitute them with classical North Indian drumming and Indonesian dance. Turns out that's not the path to academic success.

KRISTOL: Worked for you though. You're giving advice contrary to your own example. Will people believe what you did or believe what you say? That is the question.

BROOKS: I dropped out, or, you know, dropped out/kicked out splitting hairs at this point, and actually I was going to transfer to a place called Curtis, which is a prestigious music school in Philadelphia. And I got a job playing with a brass quintet, playing chamber music traveling all over the world making \$14,000 a year, which seemed like pretty good money for a 19-year-old kid. And I did that for a long time and wound up in Barcelona after that for a bunch of seasons where I started my family.

KRISTOL: So you were in the classical music world, you were playing French horn.

BROOKS: And in the jazz world too. I spent a couple of years touring with a jazz player named Charlie Byrd. And we made a couple albums together. Actually, here's an interesting thing –

KRISTOL: I don't know anything about jazz but even I know that.

BROOKS: He brought bossa nova over to the United States in the late 50s with Stan Getz and, you know, we used to have this group called "Byrd and Brass," where there were five brass players in the Charlie Byrd Trio, and his drummer was this guy – great drummer and the first time I hosted AEI's annual dinner – sort of the conservative prom and you've been to it so many times because we give out the Kristol Award, which is our highest academic honor in your father's honor. And we have a band there every year, and the first year I hosted it, the drummer in the band was the guy I had toured with and made a couple albums with Charlie Byrd. He comes up, it's been 20 years –

KRISTOL: Unbeknownst to you though?

BROOKS: Totally. And he comes up afterward and I'm standing there with my wife and he says, "Arthur Brooks?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Chuck Redd." Great drummer Chuck Redd. And he said, "What happened to you man?"

KRISTOL: Good question. But what did happen to you?

BROOKS: My wife said it was clear he was looking at me with an expression of pity on his face. I used to be a French horn player and successful, and now I'm, you know, reduced to running a think tank.

KRISTOL: So you're playing jazz and classical music, you're in Barcelona, and what piqued your interest in both coming back here and then this whole other world? You went on to get a degree and PhD, and you became a professor. Just curious.

BROOKS: How does that work? I'm often asked that. It was my wife. I married a girl in Barcelona. Actually went to Barcelona in hot pursuit. I met this girl in the summer of 1988 at a music festival, a chamber music festival in France, in the Burgundy region of France, and we didn't speak any word of the same language at all. I came back and I told my parents I met the girl I was going to marry.

And I got to know her a little bit better. It was clear I had to make a commitment, a big commitment. So I quit my job in the states and took the job at the Barcelona Symphony without knowing the language and moved over and took about a year and a half to close the deal but she married me. And we're celebrating our 24th wedding anniversary, and we have a house full of teenagers at this point.

KRISTOL: Congratulations.

BROOKS: She actually is a big thinker. She comes from – she grew up poor, but she's bright and interested in a lot of different things and a free-thinker and a free-thinker in Barcelona means you come from an atheist hard-red environment but you look around and you'd say, "Huh." It's kind of like your dad. He looks around and say, "I guess, you know, everybody who's smart is an atheist Trotskyite, but huh." That stuff is actually studied in a way that it ruins people's lives, especially poor people.

And so she's a questioner and she started questioning all of this dogma when we were newly married. People, couples grow together; well, they're supposed to grow together. And we grew together ideologically, we grew together spiritually. We came from really different cultures, which I think was an interesting thing to do. She said at some point, "You don't really love being a French horn player." And I said, "Yeah, that's right." "So why do you want to do that for the rest of your life? Why don't you do something else?"

She was studying – by the way, she had dropped out of high school when she was 16 to sing with a rock band. She graduated from high school at 29. And when she was doing her – when she was studying by correspondence, she was studying calculus by correspondence to get her high school diploma. She said, "You know, have you ever looked at this stuff?" I said, "What stuff?" She said, "Calculus." I said, "My dad was a math professor; I know nothing about that." She said, "It's unbelievable. It's life-changing. It's like religion. You got to look at it." She taught me calculus. And I said, "I need some more of this." If this is what's out there. This math is out there, and if there's something out there, like philosophy and poetry and politics and – who knows what I've been missing!

I felt like I'd just taken a look out the prison door and saw beautiful fields out there or something. So I started studying by correspondence, and it rocked my world.

KRISTOL: Which thinkers influenced you the most?

BROOKS: The original, just the great economists, of course. So when I would study, I mean, the first time I read Adam Smith, I said, "Wait a minute, this has been around since 1776? *The Wealth of Nations*. 1759, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. And I said, "How did I not know about this stuff?"

You know, the philosophers, the great poets, of course. As well as some of the true spiritual thinkers, the Stoics who influenced early Christianity, etc. – that had a huge influence at me.

But when I first started looking at public policy, I noticed that there were people like – I started reading Irving Kristol. Who was not a book writer, he was an essay writer. I read his early essays – you know, one in *The Public Interest* – I heard about his magazine *The Public Interest* – and he wrote this great essay called “Two Cheers for Capitalism,” which, of course, you’re really familiar with.

And it was when – actually it was called, “When Virtue Loses Its Loveliness,” which was related to the book *Two Cheers for Capitalism*. It seemed so sensible to me. The intellect in it was unimpeachable, it seemed. Common sense and good ideas based on human welfare. I said, “I want more of that.”

KRISTOL: People watching today think, “Well, that’s easy you just go online and you hear about Irving Kristol,” and now you can go to a website, IrvingKristol.org, part of the “Contemporary Thinkers” series – but not then. So you actually had to send away for or figure out how to get articles?

BROOKS: I would go to a bookstore, sometimes at Barnes & Nobles or Borders – big bookstores were starting to form in the late 80s and early 90s. They would sell some of these serious journals, and I would pick them up and look at these ideas, and I got *The Public Interest*. It had a big influence on me. I started to look at books by people and asking others who were thinking the same way.

In the early 90s, I read a book by Charles Murray and then wound up reading a lot more by Charles Murray. James Q. Wilson, who seemed like the most sensible man I’d ever read, and he wrote this book called *The Moral Sense* – and *The Moral Sense* actually is his most important book. People think of his work, people watching us who know Jim Wilson – and you’ve done work in your archiving his best ideas right now, which is such an important project – think of his “broken-windows” work, which revolutionized crime policy in New York City.

That wasn’t – it was great but it wasn’t his most important work, which was *The Moral Sense*. The wiring of men and women, that was what the project of that was. Your father’s, I mentioned, Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek, reading these people, they all came back to the think-tank world and mostly to AEI. And I thought, “If there was some way, some time in some parallel universe where I could be associated with this organization.”

And I decided on the basis of that work, which was mostly applied social science by the way, which used empirical methods to study big questions and try to get at truth not just to win victories. I said, “I want to be a social scientist.” So I left music, finished my bachelor’s degree, and started my PhD. I did a year, I did the core curriculum in economics at the PhD program at Cornell and then I wound up at the Rand Graduate School, which has produced more public-policy analysis PhDs than any other program in the world, as a matter of fact.

And I finished doing theater-level combat modeling for the Air Force, math modeling and applied macroeconomics, because I needed to learn the quantitative skills, while reading this AEI material and I got to know Jim Wilson himself. He sat on my – he endured my dissertation defense. And I have to say he was not very impressed.

KRISTOL: He was pretending to be a tough guy, but I’m sure he liked it.

BROOKS: My advisor when he read the first draft, my dissertation, he said, “Well, son, this is refutation of the axiom that brevity is the soul of wit. It’s brief but it’s not witty.” It wasn’t my best work, but Jim Wilson and I stuck together when I left and went into academia and gave me feedback and help all throughout my career. It brought me closer and closer to the ideas that were coming out of AEI. I became an AEI donor when I was teaching.

KRISTOL: Huge faculty salary, I’m sure.

BROOKS: Millions.

KRISTOL: Then you were recruited – I remember when there was the search, and you were well-known at that point, you'd written well-received books and were somewhat associated with AEI, but you were a surprising appointment, a little bit. Someone who hadn't been physically here before.

BROOKS: Or run anything.

KRISTOL: Or run anything. Or been to DC. So how did that happen?

BROOKS: I think, to be honest, that the last words uttered by the board before hiring me to run AEI were, "Aw, what the hell!" It was a counterintuitive pick but it was also a tough search. There's not an industry standard for leadership in the think-tank world. It's not as if there's a think tank on every corner like there are universities. There are 4,500 universities in America. A few hundred think tanks and only a few dozen major national think tanks.

So the result is when there's a chief executive search nobody knows exactly what you're looking for. And AEI, which is different – it's more academic, it has intellectual and academic freedom, compared to most think tanks. We don't take government money so we're actually going out to donors and saying, "Hey how about investing in ideas?"

They thought we need somebody who's an academic. We need somebody with a PhD and who's a researching, better if it's a social scientist. But we need somebody who can raise money. And we need somebody who's a CEO, and it was a null set. Like zero people who fit that characteristic. They looked around a lot of different people. I think some great people said they didn't want to do it, and they wound up with me.

KRISTOL: It's worked out well. What surprised you the most both about AEI and about DC? Had you lived in Washington at all?

BROOKS: Never. Washington State.

KRISTOL: The other Washington.

BROOKS: The real Washington. DC is surprising. A couple different things, some negative, some positive. My wife says when people say, "How do you like Washington?" She always says, "Well, it's great, except for the traffic and the weather and the people." And she overstates the point. The problem with DC is that well, the good thing is that it's excellent. Everything from what you're able to do to the quality of people's minds is unbelievably high. This is the center of American ideas, Washington, DC. Sad to say because it's congregating around the state in all kinds of important ways.

But there's a reason why Irving Kristol moved to Washington, DC. And this is a story in AEI history that he came to Washington, DC, left New York, when he realized New York was no longer the idea capitol and Washington was. And he was an idea man. So he had to bring his magazine and his intellectual infrastructure and his family here and the result is, I'm sure in no small part responsible for your incredible career in the intellectual world, in the journalistic world and the political world, is because you were brought up in this ecosystem and you're an idea man. That's great, and I love that. At the same time, it has a kind conventional wisdom about it, and it has its tics.

It's interested in things – we obsess on things in Washington, and I saw this, that aren't interesting to most Americans, that aren't relevant to most Americans. Ordinary Americans, to be sure, are intensely private, they're worried about soccer games and choir rehearsals and getting to work on time, etc. But beyond that it's – the ins-and-out of politics, the number of pages in the Affordable Care Act, that stuff is just boring to normal people and we talk about it as if were really not. It's like talking to sports broadcasters. Having lunch with a bunch of baseball journalists. They're talking about the statistics – but ordinary people, a little goes a long way. We talk about it as if it was more interesting, more relevant than it really was.

One thing that really surprised me about Washington, by the way, I'd never met a Congressman before I came here, I'd never met a politician and suddenly as President of AEI, I was meeting all these people that I'd only seen on TV. By the way, including you. When I met the Congressmen, the Senators and members of Congress, what really shocked me is that I kind of expected them to be what Americans think of members of Congress. Which is they're not that great. They're sort of careerist and they feel like they have tenure and they're not really into it. Sort of a mediocrity. I was wrong.

Most of the members of Congress I've met are really excellent. They're smart, they're dedicated, they're totally patriotic. They want to improve the country. They're not always successful. And some are not great, to be sure, but by far most of them have just been incredibly impressive to me and that's something is important for – I tell people. I'm going to go to Texas today, and people will ask about that and I'm telling you they're better than you think.

KRISTOL: So the dysfunction isn't so much the people but the system somehow?

BROOKS: There's a lot of different things but the system has changed very much, and it's true that the system has changed in a way that's led to greater fragmentation and change and decentralization of power, and that is that politics is in a period of change just like the think-tank industry and journalism. There are a lot of people that regret it and wish it would stay the way it always was and it's not going to.

III: On Higher Education (32:59 – 52:33)

KRISTOL: I want to come back to the current moment in American politics and American conservatism – you've thought so much, you've written very interestingly about that. Thinking about your own background, you taught at a university for several years and came from there to a think tank. You educated yourself to an amazing degree outside of the college, university environment.

Let's talk about American high education because it's an interesting, and important and problematic topic. What's your basic judgment on American colleges and universities?

BROOKS: I am an outsider to it, although I grew up in the world of liberal arts education because my dad was a college professor. My grandfather was the Dean of Students at Wheaton College in Illinois, so it's, you know, multi-generations in this. Then, I dropped out and went through correspondence education, which is a non-traditional path and then did my PhD and went to work at universities. I taught at Georgia State for three years and then at Syracuse at the Maxwell School of Public Affairs for seven years.

And it was a great experience. I have to say people who are jaundiced about the American university that's overplayed in the same way that people – it's populist folk wisdom that members of Congress are idiots, they're not. They're not bad people. And universities are not bad places. There's a lot of bad things going on at universities but on balance these universities are a great gift to the United States and American universities are a gift to the world.

If you look at what's going on in graduate programs, still the American universities dominate the system all over the globe and that's important to keep in mind. The problem, as an outsider, as I see it, and spending 10 years, most of it as a tenured professor, is basically two-fold.

One is that universities have a tendency to ask two wrong questions. The big – the first wrong question they tend to ask is, "What are you?" As if they impose this question on students. So students who are watching us today, particularly people who are getting ready to go to college, you're going to get asked, "What are you?" And that is basically, "What are you? I'm a physicist, I'm an economist, I'm a business major." And you know, that is an incredibly materialistic view of people that's imposed from this intellectual force.

That's hugely problematic because once you answer that question, once you define yourself in terms of that question, the world will follow with another a question, which is, "How much money?" And that's a tyranny. That's a manmade prison that people get in. Materialism notwithstanding, but we often hear from the conservative movement as if abundance were an end in itself, these things truly are a kind of human

tyranny. They hold human welfare back. We need to rebel against it. We need to become detached from it. This is very important in every spiritual tradition but it's just in a humanistic tradition – we all understand that to be true. So that's the first wrong question that we tend to have.

The second is, and this is much newer and this is more troubling still. The question that students are asked is "Who are you?" And that's what gets into the awful identity politics that dominate university campuses today. Where we go from everything to esoteric departments to identity all the way through to the climate of micro-aggression, so called micro-aggression. People who are watching us today who are at universities suffering through this weird culture. It's because of that question, "Who are you?" You have to answer the question, "Who are you?" No you don't! The world has a follow-up question to that too which is, "Who cares?" The world doesn't care who you are. You shouldn't care who you are.

KRISTOL: People in college really care who they are?

BROOKS: Because they're being asked that. And indeed this is a period, from 18 to 22, where you're trying to figure out your identity and when that's dignified, when that's put under the microscope, when you're told that truly is an important question that can wreck your life. What are you and who you are the wrong questions, the real question is – that we have to answer and this comes from the virtue of intellect and high education, the virtue of education per se of improving oneself of the purpose of – in my own personal view glorifying God and serving fellow man – is, "Why are you? Why are you who you are and what you are?"

The "why" question is the interrogative that's meaningful in people's lives. In higher ed, when you're in this ecosystem of learning or supposed to be in an ecosystem of learning, you should be able to come to that question. Why am I on Earth? The happiest, the most fulfilled people who've done the most for humanity are the ones who have a very strong understanding of why they're on the Earth. Why they're alive. And by the way, many of them also have an understanding of why they will die. So soldiers who've confronted that have an understanding of what they've been willing to die for. Why would I die?

And, in a materialistic world we don't have good questions for why am I alive and why should I not be alive? And those are the question that should come from an environment of learning and set us on a trajectory of learning about ourselves and learning about the world that's neither identity politics nor materialism. The two tyrannies are what's ruining higher ed and getting away from the fundamental question is probably the most troubling thing about universities today.

KRISTOL: I guess the good news is with our bountiful country and modern technology and these kinds of conversations hopefully, and the websites and everything you do at AEI, and summer programs and all kinds of other things. And you did this yourself, before all these things existed so it shows how doable it is – one can go around or above the institutions of higher ed, right? I mean, one can educate oneself or find other people to educate one.

BROOKS: It's not an efficacious way of doing it; it's more efficient to use the institutions that we've created.

KRISTOL: To have great teachers and great courses.

BROOKS: And the truth is that these things exist. These things really exist. I have a senior right now in high school, right now my eldest son, and he's getting ready to go to college and he's looking at all these colleges and these things are great. My wife and I look at this, and we're shocked at this smorgasbord, intellectually, of the things that are out there and the wonderful professors and the people who think big.

And you know, it's actually just not right what people say that this is nothing more than a, you know, a hotbed of Communism and – there is that out there but there's so much more that people can learn. And for conservative kids, there are all kinds of places they can go. And by the way, there are conservative kids watching us right now, and I have to say it's pretty, it's a pretty good idea to go to a left-wing

institution and spend some time there. You'll really understand who you are. I mean, you're a Harvard man, and my guess is you didn't get any more left-wing when you were at Harvard.

KRISTOL: To the contrary. Being surrounded by liberals is the best way not to be a liberal.

BROOKS: The thing that I recommend to, we have a lot of young people at AEI, people under 30. And I recommend that they read things that they disagree with, they talk to people they disagree with. And there's a couple of different reasons to do that. Number one, guys like you and me, we can understand what we think because it's challenged. An intellectual is more beholden to go through that exercise, I think. The other thing is to remember who our brothers are. Quite literally speaking by the way, my older brother with whom I'm very close is a liberal. He lives in Seattle, he's well-educated, he's smart, he has the same religious values as I do, he has the same family values that I do but he's a lefty.

When I hear conservatives say that left-wingers are stupid, that left-wingers are morally craven, they're talking about my brother and I take it personally. So it's important for people to build relationships with people with whom they really disagree. We're not talking about ISIS here.

KRISTOL: That's one of the worst things about colleges and universities, I think, is the uniformity, which prevents people on the left from actually meeting or encountering intelligent criticism.

BROOKS: So they'll tend to vilify, they'll tend to feel like people like you and me – I mean, how many times have you and I gotten the unsolicited email about how neocons, like you and me, because of our views on foreign policy and domestic policy, we simply want blood for oil and we want to hurt poor people. That's because of a lack of culture. That's because of a lack of mixing with our brothers and sisters who disagree with us. And it's the same problem, propensity that we have on the right to vilify the other because we're basically just not cultured enough.

KRISTOL: You have a ton of interns here – both in college and then people come right out of college and work here for a year or two, some of them come to *The Weekly Standard*. Some of them might have even written for us. They're terrific young men and women. Are you generally – how worried are you, I guess I'd say, about the colleges – you're sort of optimistic that people find ways to educate themselves anyway?

BROOKS: I am optimistic. I'm an optimistic about everything, and when I look at the identity politics, it really bothers me a lot because that has a huge human toll. I think of all the good human people who are not ideological who spend their college years thinking about their identity and wasting all that time. That's wasted human capital. Has moral implications, by the way it also has economic implications and that bothers me a lot. But for people who are motivated and who want to learn, the means at their disposal are almost endless.

KRISTOL: You know, the wasted human capital, which strikes me as – it would be one thing if you wasted a few years, we've all done that in different ways probably, then you go on a different path and you sort of learn. The trouble is it's not so easy. We talk about the neoconservatives who had been liberals, they were mugged by reality – you know, my father quipped once.

A lot of it, it's not so easy psychologically, I'd say, to say, "I've been mugged by reality. I'm changing my mind about X, Y, or Z." Or, "I've read these books, and I'm now changing my mind about certain things." Especially when you've been maybe moved along a little further and you've got a little bit of a reputation of saying one thing or another, or your friends expect you to say one thing or another.

And that seems to be one of the human tolls that are paid, that the current college and university system exacts. Once people get on the path they're on, it's not so easy for them to just leave it behind six or eight years later. And I mean to the credit of people who've been able to do that. But people underestimate how difficult that is psychologically and sociologically.

BROOKS: We need – *The Weekly Standard* started in 1995, I think, right? I got the first issue. I was in graduate school. And it was hugely important and useful to me. It was a subversive tool.

KRISTOL: We've never discussed this before so this is not a set-up.

BROOKS: Not a set-up at all. And I remember I was doing a lot of work on nonprofit organizations and public funding of the arts. Because, you know, my arts background. I read in 1996 – there was a cover essay by Joe Epstein and why the arts after all should still receive government funding. That was the point of his –

KRISTOL: It's all messed up, and conservatives hate the National Endowment for the Arts, and correctly in many ways.

BROOKS: And Joe was a great intellectual.

KRISTOL: On the whole, there's something to be said for government –

BROOKS: And I read it, and by the way, I disagreed with it. I think that the arts shouldn't get government, and I thought –

KRISTOL: I'm not sure if Joe still agrees with that piece from 19 years ago.

BROOKS: But it gave me courage because a smart guy like that from the University of Chicago and a journal like *The Weekly Standard* – because it's a magazine but it's a journal, it's a journal of ideas. It's every week, and I remember getting it every week and looking forward to it and thinking maybe, maybe someday I could write in this magazine.

And the first time I ever published in that magazine, I was so proud. I showed it to my wife, and I said, "See!" I really felt like I'd made it in a way. It was because of *The Public Interest*. It was because of *The Weekly Standard*. It was because of *National Review* magazine that these ideas – and this by the way is one of the reasons that anybody's who's watching us that is a philanthropist, that's such a worthy and good thing to do to fund the subversion of ideas. And not to fund just fun things that say universities are all screwed up and websites that show the predations of the modern universities. That's fine. But really to get into that ecosystem.

There are philanthropist that fund AEI's work. We're on 100 campuses. We have Campus Councils at all the best universities in the United States, of kids, and they're not right-wingers. These are just kids who are the idea people, the leaders. And we say, "Do you want to bring more ideas? Do you want to bring more argument? Do you want to have a real intellectual environment?" And they set stuff up in these places. We have a network of faculty and administrators. We're creating the materials that are now being used in almost 500 campuses around America.

That stuff has – I know for a fact that it matters because it mattered to me and it matters to a lot of these people. So let's get behind these things and not say that all universities are rotten and evil, let's say they're good and they can be right and we can make them better but what we need to do so the kids don't become path-dependent, so they hear more than one voice, is let's get *The Weekly Standard* into the Student Union because if it weren't for that I wouldn't have heard that voice.

KRISTOL: This is why we do the "Great Thinkers," the "Contemporary Thinkers" websites. CONVERSATIONS is an attempt to get to colleges where they don't get exposed to James Q. Wilson or Friedrich Hayek or Leo Strauss or Lionel Trilling, to have those works be more accessible than they would otherwise be. If you mention one of those names, someone can now go to James Q Wilson, the website for James Q Wilson, the "Contemporary Thinkers," and read up on him in an intelligent way.

I think we do underestimate, and I'm curious since you did this yourself – it's in a way too easy when a lot of our friends say, "We'll get the material out there, and people will find it, and they'll change their mind."

And they will and some terrific people will, and that's the reason to do it but it is – this is where I think the damages that colleges do is hard once you're, you've gone through that everyone you know has a certain set of views sociologically and kind of expected that you would have these views.

It takes a certain amount of courage, it took you a certain amount of courage to break from what you were expected to believe. And one word of advice you'd give people watching this who are sort of – maybe someone who kind of senses the things he's being taught aren't quite right but it's a little awkward and difficult and unpopular to sort of start venturing other views.

BROOKS: Part of it is we conflate thinking differently with being unpleasant and those are separable ideas. One of the biggest problems that we have – the main things that holds back conservative ideas on college campuses is college conservatives. I don't mean this in any way pejoratively, but I talk to a lot of campus Republicans and all that and they're inviting people to campus who have pretty hateful ideas sometimes. People who simply want to throw insults at liberals. People who are not working to get along in, to have the conservative movement to integrate into the mainstream such that we can get more people thinking like us.

Rightness is more important than – having some people see us as right is more important than having this intellectual integrity, I think to a certain extent. By the way, James Q Wilson gave me this advice. When I was an assistant professor and I was just coming up for tenure I was starting to write a lot for *The Wall Street Journal*, and I was completely ideologically out of the closet. I mean, I was writing about conservative ideas, and I started to get protested a little bit. I would go and I would give a paper at another university, and it would be unpleasant sometimes. I would get confronted sometimes, and it freaked me out because I had heard all these stories about people not getting tenure because they were ideologically impure. So I called Jim Wilson and I said, "What do I do?" And he said, "It's easy, there's an easy formula. You can be successful in academia and you can be conservative. You just have to be four times as productive as the liberals and twice as nice." And you know, that's good advice.

KRISTOL: Is it ok to just pretend to be twice as nice?

BROOKS: Or pretend to be four times as productive.

KRISTOL: That we can do. Being twice as nice, that's a tough –

BROOKS: When you think about it and this is what I recommend to conservatives on campus today. Think about the exposure that people are having to your views. So you're – you have a late-night dorm bowl session. The things that you talk about, the free-market ideas, the rejection of libertinism, standing up for American leadership around the world, these conservative things. This is going to be the first time certain people have heard them. You are, to use the language of statistics, N equals one. That's a hundred percent of the conservative views.

What do you want people to take away from that? "I saw this conservative, and he was jerk. He was mean. He didn't like other people. He sounded a little racist." Do you want people to think that? Or do you want people to say, "You know, I think he was wrong, but I think that he actually loves poor people. I think that he wants to stand up for people who are under tyranny around the world. I think that he actually cares about people other than himself, and I think that he's not attached to money. I think that he has higher motives." People might think you're a little crazy, but they should also think that you're good. And that you have these good motives.

That's one of the reasons, by the way, when I talked to college – I'm on college campuses all the time – I recommend that you steal the language and icons of the left. Why? Because a lot of their language and icons are great. Poverty, social justice, fairness, compassion. The great moral leaders of our time, like the Dalai Lama, used this. This is important. These people are right, and these concepts are good. Here's the truth. Here's the reason I'm a conservative. Our ideas attain those goals better than left-wing ideas do. Literally, the reason I'm a conservative today because poverty is what I care about the most, and conservative ideas have done more – when I talk about that I mean free enterprise and American

military leadership around the world – are the two things that have pulled more people out of poverty than any of the two things of the history of humanity.

Bill, two billion have been pulled out of poverty since I was a kid and it's because of free enterprise, spreading around the world after 1970 through globalization and property rights and the rule of law and entrepreneurship. And American military presence. The global hyperpower of America, which imperfect to be sure, but which has kept places like the Pacific Ocean free for trade. This stuff that people don't know. And if we say, "Look, I care about what you care about. My ideas actually can get us there faster." You'll win converts and people will have the sense of – I think you'll give aid and comfort to those looking for an excuse to entertain our ideas. And that's what colleges today can do.

KRISTOL: Also making fun of liberal idiotic –

BROOKS: To a certain degree. Although we overplay that. It's so easy.

KRISTOL: It's easier now than it was then. I was influenced by that, I'd say. People just kind of sense – the earnestness of the left as they march behind foolish things.

BROOKS: Sanctimoniousness of it, it invites contemptuous satire. It begs for it. I got it.

KRISTOL: You're saying, resist that, to some degree?

BROOKS: I think that we have to remember what does it mean to be twice as nice?

KRISTOL: We may differ on the twice as nice thing.

BROOKS: Remember Judeo-Christian charity.

KRISTOL: I can't really argue with that.

IV: Conservatism and Conservative Politics (52:33 – 1:06:49)

Let's talk about conservatism today. You and I have both been struck by how much it's in turmoil in a good way and maybe in challenging ways too, and general politics just seems to be sort of up in the air in a way it probably wasn't in the Cold War years and wasn't maybe in the 90s even. Or after 9/11, there was certainly a view among conservatives about things abroad and to some degree at home. It just seems that everything is sort of up for grabs now. Is that correct? Do people always think that? If so, what does one take from that? What's your sense?

BROOKS: In the conservative movement?

KRISTOL: Conservative movement, conservative politics. American politics, generally.

BROOKS: Things have again, the elites have lost control simply because information has become democratized. When information becomes democratized, then the next thing that necessarily follows is the means of support becomes democratized.

KRISTOL: What do you mean by means of support?

BROOKS: For example, when party elites were really in charge of ideas, then they tended to be able to control the money as well. What happened at first was the advent of the Internet made it possible for people to have ideas of what's going on. It really started with talk radio on the right, where talk radio basically said, "You know everything you're hearing is not necessarily right." The idea that we always have to get along, and it's always and everywhere going to be the case of Republicans are a strong minority trying to hit the brakes on liberal excess. Which was, by the way, the received wisdom of the 1970s and early 1980s to a certain extent, certainly in Congress.

That started to be relaxed with the advent of talk radio and the phenomenon, the one-man phenomenon of New Gingrich. Where he basically started saying, "That's not right. We don't have to be a minority. We can be majoritarian." And he did it in a very brilliant way too, by the way. He stopped fighting against liberal things, and he started fighting directly for people who'd been left behind. And that was a rhetorical but also a substantive shift in conservative thinking.

But then the way that the ideas got out. It went from talk radio to, of course, the Internet, and people who were powerful didn't have as much power, they couldn't control the messages enough. That led to different funding mechanisms and that's really what we're seeing today. The reason there's so much apparent chaos in the Republican Party today is because if you're a party boss you can't control the money.

KRISTOL: Don't you think also, though, elites have lost legitimacy because they've been wrong a lot? I'm struck by that. When you talk to elites, they don't think this way. But if you're a normal person and you're being reassured in 2006, 07, 08, "Don't worry, the Fed knows what's it's doing. The economists know what they're doing, distributing risk. Wall Street knows what it's doing. Government knows what it's doing." So elites on both right and left, it seems to me, didn't know what they're doing.

It turned out we had a huge financial crash – and we could debate, we could say more liberal policies that were responsible for it, you know, Barney Frank and Congress and Fannie Mae, and the left would say, "No, no it's Wall Street." Either way – and there's probably some truth in both – the elites were wrong, and foreign policy, too, elites made a lot of mistakes, again on right and left, I would say. It does seem and certainly on social trends – so many unanticipated things happened and I do have a sense that the public in a good way, I think, is much more suspicious of what the experts are telling them. Sometimes that can get out of hand too, when they think, I don't know, vaccines don't work or something.

BROOKS: But again this has to do with the dissemination of information where you can question elites, where you do know that they have been wrong and why they've been wrong. There's less of an ability to go back and backfill your mistakes than there has been in the past. There's a permanent record. One of my high school kids just finished reading Orwell's *1984* where the main character, Winston Smith, spends his whole day in the Ministry of Truth changing old newspapers so that the current events are synchronous with past announcements.

The Internet has made that less and less and less possible in the modern world. This whole idea of what I always said, what I always mean and people will go back and confront you with things that you said that are self-evidently wrong. All of us face that who are in the public eye and have public positions and the result is, if your humility doesn't keep up with that, that you're going to pay and people are going to lose confidence, and in fact they have.

KRISTOL: And that's both a good thing and a bad thing, I suppose, from the point of governance?

BROOKS: It's mostly, I think mostly – I think we will find 20 years from now in retrospect that it was a good thing. I think that more information is a good thing. People who are traditional in journalism tend to regret it. I still talk to people who say, "Look, if your fingers don't get dirty, you haven't read the news." That's an extreme version of this, but I think that more information tends to be better. And I know that information can be used and can be poured into vessels that are not very well prepared for it but this is the way that people get more prepared. We're going to get a more prepared population over the next 10 years and this is going to turn out to be good.

KRISTOL: Circling back to where we began, it does affect how a think tank thinks about what it's doing, right? In the way the 70s 80s model is very much top-down – experts get together and influence leaders and opinion leaders and politicians and the public's not that much a part of the discussion, not that anyone was really excluding them, it was just the way things worked, they weren't that much a part of the discussion. There was confidence, too, that even on the right – opposed to the left's kind of dominance and left-wing experts – there was a certain confidence that well, the conservative experts will instead get

it right. It does seem it must change your life and the life of people here at AEI in a very fundamental way.

BROOKS: In a good way. In a very good way. One of the things that we've seen over the past seven years – and I say seven years because that's how long I've been running AEI, but it was before that too. That we've needed to invest a lot more in communications such that we can reach the leaders that we're trying to reach. AEI's business model is one of leading leaders. And leading leaders with good ideas to make their lives easier and so they can use them. Why? Because that's a leverage principle. So the leaders that we work with are in politics, business, academia, media, and in communities. And increasingly, community leaders are extremely important in political movements and policy movements.

And the key thing to be able to lead leaders is to be able to inject ideas directly into their worlds. So “build it, and they will come” – *The Field of Dreams*-approach to policy is utterly anachronistic. It's building a website that nobody every goes to. Or doing a podcast that nobody ever listens to. What you need to think about is how you can go direct to consumers? How do we find the people who need your work and get it to them? Sometimes at the mass level you have to talk going directly to followers of policy ideas. Why? Because with many leaders they're not going to lead with ideas until there's a parade that they're going to want to jump out in front of. You got to start a parade at certain times, too.

But all of this comes down to better ways of getting the ideas across, which is why we built out massively our government affairs division where we go to the Hill. We have people walking around the Hill who say, “You got testimony coming up? Well, we have experts, and they're going to say the truth all the time, but if you agree with our experts, as opposed to our experts agreeing with you, you're going to be right.” That's actually increased it so we do just way more Congressional testimonies than we've ever done before. We have a media division that's tripled and quadrupled the amount of work we do in the press than we've ever done before. Which is a thrill. Having people interested in our ideas.

Our scholars like it, and our scholars are really good at it. We've all gone through media training where we're better at it than we were before. There's always this tinge of regret, “How come we can't just do ideas?” Well, doing ideas means getting them to the people who need them the most because what we're about, it's not just the art of art's sake. We're art for or policy for the sake of human development, and that means getting it to the policymakers who matter. So it's changed the way we do business quite a lot.

BROOKS: And it seems to me that you've also encouraged and I've talked to people over the years – that people should not just speak more to other people but learn more from other people, including practitioners.

Certainly in the case of Iraq – where I wasn't very much involved in trying to help plan the surge, but help make the case for the surge and publicized it and defended it – and that was really learning from people who had been there, to some degree. And that was really different from the old model. You know? The idea that you'd call in some colonels and some majors and some captains and say, “What is going on there?” And then Fred Kagan and others said, “We need to have a whole different model, and luckily, Dave Petraeus has thought a lot about this and this single kind of insurgency, and it will take more troops –”

The degree of learning, I think, that goes on and the way in which people learn is different from 20, 30, 40 years ago.

BROOKS: There's so much more knowledge out there. There's the principles that our knowledge doubles every 10 years or so and the result of that is that knowledge that we need to be good scholars resides in different places and in more places. And so iterative learning is incredibly important for scholars to be able to engage in. So even how I do my own work, my early books when I was in academia they tended to run a lot of regressions, use big datasets, read the articles of others and then write about these topics. Now there's – I do those things but I'll also have an element of reading outside my field, everything from aesthetics to philosophy to Eastern wisdom, if I need to.

And also working with practitioners such that there's field work involved in this. There's some urgent reporting in this. And I'm not becoming a journalist but there's so much information out there that it enriches the way we talk. And it also makes it more compelling and incredible. Plus quite frankly, I want the truth and if I'm wrong I want to know first and you're going to learn that from all kinds of different sources.

KRISTOL: You talk more about aesthetics and those kinds of topics than most people I've known that run think tanks, and most people in Washington. Say a word about that. You come from the music world so is it an idiosyncrasy of yours or something you think is important?

BROOKS: I think it's important. I really do. Why? Because the – I've found that there's a lot less difference between being a French horn player and a composer and running a think tank than I ever would have understood. The world of creativity is the world of creativity.

You're using different media, and to a certain extent for different ends, than you would be otherwise and so a lot of what I learned – for example, I do a lot of public speaking, I do 150 speeches a year, which is what modern think-tank presidents need to do because we spend 75 percent of our time raising funds. A place like AEI raised \$40 million a year, which is a lot. And we don't charge anybody for anything, we take no money from the government at all, ever.

So the result is this is where all the money comes from and I'm responsible for, with the fantastic development team, to make it happen. The way that people are interested in that is by disseminating ideas. So scholars are out on the road talking to audiences that can use their ideas and also to donors and so am I. I'm on the road. I will do 80 trips or something this year, but when I'm talking to get the points across it's a question of expression, it's a question of making things and ideas compelling. And the policy world didn't invent how to make things compelling.

Musicians did that and poets did that, and writers and artists were in the business of making things more compelling. So all of us need to think to ourselves about the aesthetics of what we're doing. What is it we can do so that people will be attracted to it? Here's the basic math, Bill – by the way this is basic math that Republicans need to learn in my opinion. If Republicans want to win, if conservatives want to win, they need to make themselves more attractive to more people. Not scream louder to fewer people. It turns out that's not graduate level. But that really – but also it's doing the right things such that people can – we're trying to help people be right and help others.

That's really a big part of the service agenda of the political right is to be correct and to help others, to lead others to help fellow men and women. To do that, to be more attractive, you have to have a strong sense of what the aesthetics are. What is my message? Is it easy to listen to? Is this fun? Is it interesting? Is it funny? And you know that's what gets into everything from, what is your use for religion? What is your use of poetry? What did you learn from music? A well-rounded intellectual today who's trying to be a public intellectual better be spending some time every day reading poetry, listening to music, reading literature, looking at paintings, understanding what is in the mind of the artists. That is what I think it means to be a well-rounded, communicating intellectual.

KRISTOL: It's funny, not funny, it's nice I suppose the head of a think tank, which 30 years ago would have been a more narrow thing to be than a university president or a dean, now is the one making the way for poetry, for art, for being a well-rounded intellectual as people were perhaps a century ago. It's the universities that really push, unfortunately, I think, push the younger scholars to real specialization, to disciplinary –

BROOKS: That's the "What are you?" question. When the scholars themselves at universities are entirely stove-piped and not well-rounded aesthetically, they're going to tend to ask the kids, "What are you? Are you an engineer? What are you? Are you a gender studies major? What are you?" Then it metastasizes into the "Who are you?" questions, and that's actually where it comes from. The not being well-rounded.

Which the beauty of knowledge, the beauty of intellect of the aesthetics that actually come from living in the world lead us to ask the why questions fundamentally.

I want AEI and my colleagues, the wonderful scholars of AEI, we want AEI to be about the why of better policy and the why of America and the why of a better world.

KRISTOL: I can't think of a better note to end on. Arthur, thanks so much for being here today, and thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]