

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Harvey Mansfield, Harvard University

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I: Machiavelli on Politics and Morality (0:015 – 35:55)

KRISTOL: Hi I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased to have with me again Harvey Mansfield, Professor of Philosophy, of Political Philosophy at Harvard University. I guess Government Department, but the political philosophy subsection of Government.

And leading interpreter, translator, student of Machiavelli. And you're going to explain Machiavelli and modernity today. Machiavelli and modernity for dummies.

MANSFIELD: Was Machiavelli the founder of modernity?

KRISTOL: Yes, that's my question. I learned that from you, and I dutifully repeated it in my few years of teaching, but I can't say I really understood it.

MANSFIELD: Well, let's attack the meaning of those words. First, Machiavelli doesn't speak of himself as a founder; he doesn't seem to use that word very much. I think if you wanted to know what he thought of himself was, he was a prince. A strange kind of prince. A thinker or a writer who's a prince. But that doesn't – that isn't announced.

And then modernity. For him he lived in modernity already. Modernity was – especially Christian modernity – was the ancients who have been corrupted into decadent Christianity. Christianity, which is both weak and cruel. It saps your sense of honor, your sense of honor in this world, and makes you think always of the other world. But then it can sometimes make you go on crusades to save other people's souls, and that makes it cruel.

So those – so modernity for him is something bad. Originally. And it's only as you see what he does with the term and with his own thought that modernity turns out to be something good and new.

There are the ancients and there are the moderns, and Machiavelli says the ancients are strong and the moderns are weak. But that gets turned around. Because it turned out that the ancients were defeated by the moderns. That the pagan world was overthrown by the Christian world. How did the ancients get defeated by someone who's weaker?

That's the, you could say, the first puzzle that he offers, and his answer is that the moderns or the Christians are stronger than they seem, and that their religion, which seems to make you both weak and cruel, can actually be reinterpreted to do the opposite and to make you strong and free.

Now, how did he do this? You can look at, I think, say, three areas: politics and morality and philosophy.

Let's start with politics and morality. What did he want to change in order to make us better, more

effective, and more modern? Well, the best text to start from, I think, is the first paragraph in the 15th chapter of *The Prince* in which Machiavelli says that he departs from the orders of others. How does he depart? He says that others have asked you to behave as you ought to behave, and he says you must take as your standard how men actually behave. So you must go from the *ought* to the *is* or what exists. And that's a usual – that's usually known as realism. And so Machiavelli, you could say, begins realism as a feature of both politics and morality.

But there is a characteristic of realism, which is that he doesn't think that it's realistic to give up on politics or to give up on morality. The criticism that he makes of the previous politics and morality, he says that they're all based on imagination, they're not based on an understanding of the effectual truth. That is, the way things actually proceed as opposed to the way you would wish or would like them to proceed.

So you must take as your standard then what will make you succeed realistically, and that standard, the word that he uses is *necessity*. So it's kind of a paradox. You'll make yourself more free and more strong if you behave as if you were a pawn, you could say, of necessity. So that's realism. Or is it?

Because underneath Machiavelli's realism and modern realism generally is idealism. In other words, a realism that has – the other side of which is the opposite, idealism. It's a realism, which thinks that by being realistic you will make your life much better than otherwise it could have been.

KRISTOL: But surely before Machiavelli there were hard-headed realistic observers of politics who knew that life didn't go according to – politics wasn't always conducted according to moral dictates and idealistic cities and so forth.

MANSFIELD: You can say that all the ancients were aware of this. And some of them thought that the best thing to do was to go into imaginary best regimes and use that as your standard. That's, generally speaking, the Socratic tradition of Plato and Aristotle, and Machiavelli refers to that as basing your hopes on imaginary republics and principalities. Imaginary republics like Plato's Republic and imaginary principalities like St. Augustine's City of God.

For him, underneath realism or this sort of pessimistic view of human possibilities, there is opportunity for great change for the better. If by being realistic, if you turn realistic, you can solve all the problems that the ancients had when it came to, when their basis was imaginary.

Necessity replaces imagination. Now how does this happen? Well, for both morality and politics, and especially morality, you can begin from his play called *The Mandragola*. That play is a comedy. It tells of a young man who falls in love with a beautiful woman who happens to be married to a professor of political science – or that's a slight exaggeration. A man named Messer Nicia.

But the woman is very Christian and very chaste. She believes very much that she should keep her vows as a wife and not consort with young men who happen to fall in love with her. But she wants a child. She and her husband want a child. Her husband wants him for political purposes. So the play proceeds in such a way that everybody gets what he wants. The young man gets to possess his love. And the couple gets to have a child.

The reason they couldn't have a child is that one of them – and that's a bit of a comical part – namely, the professor, doctor, Messer Nicia is sterile, but of course, he thinks it's his wife who is the cause of it. So it's a complicated tale. But the result is that is – it's just as simple lesson. If you are brave enough to choose the way of adultery, you can have a child. What they do is –

KRISTOL: Who's not known to be an adulteress's child?

MANSFIELD: So they have a complicated way of bringing this about. But the end of the play is a complete success because the couple gets the child and, as I say, the young man gets his prize. And so the lesson is if you do evil, the result will be good, but if you do good, the result will be evil. So if you do good and be chaste and refuse to engage in adultery, you won't get that child. But if you're willing to let

somebody else who's not sterile actually father the child, then the result will be good.

So that I think is the general moral lesson of Machiavelli. If you can relax the absolute standards of morality, then you can make them succeed in what they're trying to do. And you see the Bible says, "Be chaste. No adultery." But it also says, "Be fruitful and multiply." So the Bible really doesn't give you the means necessary to the end.

And if you really want to be fruitful and multiply and have a child, you have to be willing to relax your morality. And actually you can say that in Aristotle, too, the same contradiction exists. He says, "Man is a pairing animal by nature." But he also says, "By nature we like to be able to reproduce." If you can reproduce only by deserting or abandoning, at least for the moment, your wife or your husband, then that's something you need to do, according to Machiavelli.

That's necessary, seeing how he presents necessity. The necessary means to a perfectly good end. Or one lapse of nature, or one lapse of morality, will get you what morality wants. So that's a view of morality. And what it suggests then is that morality can't stand on its own the way it wants to. If you're a moral person, you're supposed to be moral because it's moral. And not because someone is watching you or praising or going to reward you for your morality.

But for Machiavelli, no, you have to look at the consequences. So you have to look at how you are held – as in this Chapter 15, he talks about what moral qualities might be, but he also talks about how you are *held* if you want to be moral. If you're generous, say, and want to be *held* generous, what you – you can't always be generous because it won't succeed. If you always try to give to someone who deserves something, that person will after a while consider it to be routine. And he won't be grateful to you anymore. So you have to be concerned with a reaction of the person, of another person to your moral behavior.

And that means that morality, speaking generally, is politicized. You always have to think of the situation that you're in when you're going to be moral. How will people react to this? And they won't react to morality with morality. It's foolish to expect that if you do a good deed to someone, that person will do a good deed back to you, and that's because that person thinks that he deserves this good deed that you've given to him. He doesn't look at it as *your* generosity he looks at it as *his* justice. Why therefore should he do something good for you? Just because you've done something good for him?

So that would be the way in which beneficiaries of benevolent deeds look on benevolence. And if you generalize this and try to apply it to all the moral virtues, you see that you come up with his picture of what you must do – what it is prudent to do, in terms of morality.

KRISTOL: So why does that make him, I guess the – there were people before him who were not devout believers in piety or morality, who understood there were tensions between moral demands and either pleasure or political advancement or so forth. There were troublemakers.

Everyone ranging from ancients to people who lived just a century or two before Machiavelli or his contemporaries who were critics of morality, you might say, in various ways. Advisors to princes who understood that you couldn't really be moral, even if it's better to look moral.

So I guess but the sort of the normal kind of cartoon version of Machiavelli is this hardheaded debunker of morality of all that. Obviously, the next step somehow, as the founder of modernity, that's different somehow. The argument is that Machiavelli pushes that in a direction beyond debunking. Or hard-headedness or cleverness.

MANSFIELD: You could say that he starts from the – Machiavelli and those who preceded him but haven't earned that name. And the reason that they haven't earned that name is they didn't have a Machiavelli to justify them. So the people who justified them were like Aristotle and the Bible, that always putting before you the demands of morality as opposed to the advantages of it or the advantages of appearing it.

The people that came before Machiavelli and who did this always were inhibited by this – the atmosphere, you could say, of morality, which had been imposed by the philosophers and by religion. It wasn't – yes, it wasn't that the philosophers didn't realize too that you had to be careful of the way you looked if you tried to do something immoral, but that there were advantages to being immoral. It wasn't that they didn't know that, but they thought that, on the whole, it was good and necessary to – goodness depended on a climate, you would say, or an atmosphere in which goodness is thought to be primary.

And that your main business in life was to lead a good life and not just to survive in a situation of scarcity.

KRISTOL: Amoralists who preceded Machiavelli – presumably, an awful lot wrote in private – I don't know much about Boccaccio, but people like that. The difference is that Machiavelli believes somehow it's not just a way to personally flourish in a climate where others are moral, but somehow he can change – it will help human beings. Again, what makes him distinctive and the founder of modernity?

MANSFIELD: Yes, you could imagine that Mandragola story being told by Boccaccio. But then the lesson that he would draw is how paradoxical our life is. On the one hand, we want to be good, and on the other hand, we refuse to take the measures that are necessary to succeed.

KRISTOL: And some clever individual might see that and take care of his own life in that way.

MANSFIELD: But to make this general and, I could say, political is something quite new. Now, Machiavelli didn't make a new morality that would be more realistic as a whole. He was a little more subtle and complicated than that.

Later on, in the 17th century, you had a new morality of the rights of man. And the primary right of man is self-preservation. That's really, Machiavellian in origin, as you can see back in this paragraph in *The Prince* that I mentioned that you don't – if you follow the moral way or how people ought to behave, you learn your own ruin rather than your preservation.

Machiavelli, too, was in favor of preservation, but he thought that you couldn't really change morality for the people, for most people, that means. Most people are weak. Most people are aware that there are powers over them that they can't control. Most people resort – to make their lives more secure and more calm – to religion. Because religion tells you that you will be taken care of by God if you follow the necessary commands of God.

Most people think that if you are treated unjustly, God will save you or will reward you and will punish the person who treats you unjustly in the next life. So most people look on this world as depending on the goodness of paradise and hell in the next life. And they call on the strength of religion to cover over the defects of their own weakness.

And I think Machiavelli believed that this would never change. And this is a permanent feature of human existence. So morality will never go away. There will always be, if not Christianity, something similar that has the same effect. But at the same time, these are not all people. There are princely types that you mention, that have always existed, but now have a kind of new license to operate in their way.

Also, new techniques to use, that Machiavelli gives them in his political science. And these are princes, and princes have prudence. Most people don't have prudence, princes have prudence. Every society has princes. You can't have a multitude without a head, and the head has to be a prince. These princes are taught by Machiavelli that it's perfectly okay to exempt themselves from the religion, that you can really, say, manipulate in order to control the mass of the people.

This, I think, is what makes Machiavelli different from preceding philosophers who also may have thought that religion was necessary for the common people. But they didn't think the prince could exempt himself from religion or at least be seen to do so.

KRISTOL: This is for the sake of the prince, or for the sake of, ultimately, the project that he launches for humankind?

MANSFIELD: It's for the sake of the prince, but especially in order to keep his office. He must do what is necessary to keep his office. But it's mainly for the sake of the people, actually. It keeps them more secure to have a prince who can act sometimes against them, but mostly on their behalf. Because what princes mainly do is secure themselves against other princes.

And to do this they need the help or the backing of the common people. So you get the picture – the typical picture of Machiavelli's politics, which is an alliance between the prince and the common people. And this – it's not an aristocracy. The typical picture of Aristotelian politics is the rule of the aristocrats, of the better sort, more refined, anyway. The nobles. But Machiavelli doesn't like gentlemen. He thinks that princes should attack gentlemen.

One of the best ways to get the common people on your side is to kill the gentlemen because the common people – maybe they don't always express it – but they have kind of deep underlying hatred of their betters. The weak hate the strong. So, you can with – it's a sensational execution now and again – that's one of Machiavelli's techniques, political techniques. You can impress the common people.

Now, you wouldn't impress them unless you can really shock them. Machiavelli retains a kind of sensationalism. He doesn't want life or political life to be without drama and excitement. That's – moral life is kind of boring so morality needs immorality if only to keep itself more interesting than it otherwise would be. Morality serves to make people capable of shock. Unless you can be impressed or be shocked, you won't really believe what is necessary.

Now, morality has a further characteristic that it wants always to be absolute. It never makes exceptions for necessity. But that's really impossible. So back to *The Mandragola*. It was really impossible for that couple, Messer Nicia and his wife Lucrezia, to have a child by themselves.

Once that necessity was accepted, then you see in order to accept it, you have to violate morality. So morality, on the one hand, is always alive and always insistent that it be respected. It always wants to make an issue of itself. But on the other hand, it can never achieve what it wants or it can't regularly do that. There always will arise some occasion in which you have to do some dirty deed in order to, in order to just keep yourself alive and certainly in order to succeed.

You can live a long life and think you're happy, but if you're not really willing to murder someone or to do him in in some dirty way, then you're living a protected existence, which you're living on fortune instead of on your own virtue.

KRISTOL: But all this deliberation of the princes and the undercutting of the morality, ultimately, is not just "This is the way the world is, and if you want to flourish, this is what you have to do," it's ultimately part of a project.

When we say Machiavelli and the founder of modernity, that somehow – to get back to where we began – rectifies the problem of the weakening of human beings and Christianity, or that strengthens human beings altogether, is somehow for the common good, right? Not just advice to his most clever readers to have more individually satisfying amoral lives.

MANSFIELD: This is a boon to mankind as a whole. Not just for the thinkers and the philosophers or the big shots. Or the princes.

KRISTOL: And in that respect, he's launching the kind of – ?

MANSFIELD: He's launching a great operation. Launching. Maybe founding goes too far, but launching. He doesn't think that in his time this is going to happen. He does think that Christianity is corrupt, that the Church is corrupt, and there's a good chance that it won't last very much longer. And indeed, of course,

in his time, almost the same year that he wrote *The Prince* – 1513 – Martin Luther nails his theses to the church. And Protestantism and the Protestant Reformation gets started. That, too, was an attack on corruption of Christianity or the Church, as it was.

So it would have to take some time for Machiavelli to influence or persuade or in a certain sense corrupt the philosophers who followed him and who might make changes in his program but still would carry out the general thrust of it. Make it happen.

So that might take a century or so, as it did. And he couldn't make his project altogether open and announce it. He does say that he's bringing new modes and orders and that he departs from the orders of others. So it's there. So anyone who reads can see that but you have to think your way, really, to the, really, enormity of his ambition. He himself is very ambitious.

He wants to do something that will affect in a positive way all mankind. And he calls that his enterprise. *La mia empresa*. *Empresa* means *enterprise*. Now, we have free enterprise. That becomes already a modern concept. A word – so the way we are today, we moderns, I think, is in good part due to the launching, let's call it – or okay, founding of Machiavelli.

KRISTOL: So the relief of man's estate, Francis Bacon, pioneers, and the new political science of Hobbes and all the things we associate with, in a more direct way, with modern politics and modern morality and modern life, that's – the argument would be that Machiavelli lays the groundwork for that?

MANSFIELD: He lays the groundwork for that. And he anticipates it. The one thing, I think, he also anticipated is that his own name would be named for doing evil. Which is, of course, what happened.

KRISTOL: He's willing to take that opprobrium?

MANSFIELD: He is. He's willing to take the opprobrium of most people, if underneath, it there isn't a certain secret admiration.

KRISTOL: Some people like you come along and show how much credit he deserves ultimately. He was confident that would happen at some point.

MANSFIELD: You're right, that someone would be open-minded, or to blurt out the truth, about his project, as we now say. Project or enterprise. Yes, so the fact that most people will use this term *Machiavellian* to mean something you mustn't do, that's part of the fact that morality is going to continue as it is. So therefore he's always going to have an ill repute. And too that's another way in which a successor of his might want to or be able to change the reputation of Machiavelli.

His successors, the early modern philosophers, owe a lot to him but they say – they hardly ever mention him. The only one he does is Francis Bacon. He was the only one brave enough, you could say, or open enough to mention his debt to Machiavelli.

KRISTOL: I suppose that illustrates Machiavelli – the correctness of his own thought or judgment to found something that would ultimately be beneficial to mankind, you'd have to do or say things or teach things that would have to be decried by conventional mankind.

MANSFIELD: He would be revered as a kind of reverse founder, of everything evil. But the actual founder, to those who can penetrate his thinking, of everything good.

KRISTOL: So just to finish on the political, moral side of it. So the key – I don't know if there's one key, but a key – he needs to publicly do what people had previously, perhaps, thought but not thought you could, should publicly –

MANSFIELD: Publicly. And the word that makes that possible is *necessity*. So it's necessary to do this or that. Which previously thought was evil, but necessary only in difficult times and emergencies, or when

things pinch you. Circumstances force you. But, no, it's necessary, and that means your principle is necessary. So it might not be necessary right now to be evil, but you have to anticipate that you might be in the future.

So that means that necessity isn't present necessity, but it's anticipated necessity, and that's much expanded. And you have to anticipate, if you're anticipating, that most people won't agree with you, that they won't see this necessity, and that is their weakness. And their weakness is their necessity. In a strange way, it's necessary for them to resist what is truly necessary.

So necessity must account for the fact that lots of people will resist you. Necessary to them, but they will resist what you see to be truly necessary and therefore in their interest.

KRISTOL: So again on this political, moral side going forward, do you think Machiavelli would have thought that after you prepared the way, Hobbes and Locke and all of them would be able to gradually change public morality in a certain way, or would he have thought at the end of the day though they can't really grasp – there would always have to be a certain kind of wistfulness or hopefulness?

I guess, well, maybe he would have thought Hobbes and Locke indulged that. They don't really expose the true necessity even as they pretend to be more or are more hardheaded. They were hardheaded but not really truly hardheaded in their public presentation, I suppose.

MANSFIELD: The right of self-preservation is not understood as the right to life, and more important than that somehow is the right to pursue happiness, which means to live your life as you wish. Which is much more of a hope than would seem to be promised by the word *necessity*.

"I can live as I wish." How can that be true? In that way, you might say liberalism, the liberalism of John Locke especially, is a kind of delusion. It keeps you from thinking about what is necessary to you, but it also serves as a justification for doing the sort of things that Machiavelli might suggest in a difficult situation or even in a non-difficult situation looking ahead to a difficult situation.

II: Machiavelli's New Philosophy (35:55 – 1:07:20)

KRISTOL: So presumably this fantastic enterprise of Machiavelli's is based on a philosophic judgement that it's both possible that human nature and nature itself makes it possible to achieve what he hopes to achieve and also that it's a good idea to achieve that, I suppose. One could have thought about these possibilities and rejected them. So what's the – why?

MANSFIELD: So first, you could say Machiavelli is the founder of modernity because he changed our politics and our ethics. A lot of people, I think, would agree with that. But I think very few see that he had a great change in philosophy in mind. And so let me talk a little bit about what that was. Because Machiavelli's not studied in philosophy departments now – he ought to be – let me suggest why.

First is the question of whether Machiavelli was a philosopher because he doesn't seem to make the kinds of detailed and careful, logical arguments that philosophers make, above all, the Scholastic philosophers. Thomas Aquinas and how they used syllogisms and worked very carefully from one question to the next question. He doesn't do that.

So what does he do? He speaks, he says, of the world, or of worldly things. He has a continuous experience of worldly things. He's done a lot of reading, and he's also done these worldly things. He thinks that there is something called the *world*, and I believe that the way that word *world* is used owes very much to Machiavelli.

What is the world? At the time that he was writing, the world meant to Christians *this* world, that's what they said, "in this world." Occasionally you'll hear that today, but not very often. Instead people speak of, "You have to live in the world." That means the world of necessity. So what he did was the move from this notion that *this* world is *the* world. This world was always contrasted with the next world, with heaven,

where things are much better.

This has a kind of parallel in Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy, that in this world there are imperfections. Your perceptions of imperfect things. And not every tree, for example, is a perfect tree. So when you see a tree, you imagine it, or you can imagine it, as if it were a perfect tree, and that would give you the definition of a tree. The definition of a tree is not visible. You can write it, you can put it in a book on botany on trees, distinguished from bushes.

So what that means is that the perceived world, the visible world, is always contrasted with the imagined world, which is thought to be intelligible. So the tree that you see, you don't fully understand until you think about it and imagine it as it could be and the ways in which its different parts – branches and leaves and roots and so on – interact to make a whole.

That means you've understood what a tree is. It's an intelligible thing. If you add up all these intelligible things, then you get nature as intelligible. Nature has genus and species. Different kinds. In this way, you can see that nature is sort of ordered, and it also has a hierarchy. Some things are higher, Aristotle would say, and others are lower. Today, you would simply say *complex* and *simple*. No, higher means capable of more things or better things. So man is a higher being than a dog. So in other words, the world is always supplemented by an understood, by something which is more important than the world you see, namely the intelligible world.

Now, what Machiavelli did was to suggest that you can't do this. And he spoke of what he called "the effectual truth." The effectual truth is what your profession amounts to. You can make a profession of good. You might say to someone close to you, "I love you." Well, the effectual truth of that is "I want something from you." You look at sort of a lowdown necessity, which is behind the profession of something, and that's what the effectual truth is.

The effectual truth means that the truth is how it comes out, the effect of it. And the effect of something is a consequence of it, but it's also the way in which it shows itself, it has an effect. That double meaning of *effectual*.

Effectual, I think, is the – it's not just the ancestor, it's closer than that. It's the parent, let's say, of the word *fact*. So the effectual truth could also be translated as "the factual truth." The fact of a thing, the way we say that today, "the fact of the matter is" – notice we say the fact of the *matter*. Matter is more factual than spirit. That's what you're saying. The fact of the matter. When you say that, it's kind of an objection. You may wish something – so fact is understood as opposed to wish, and that's why facts are sometimes called "brute facts" or "stubborn facts."

All this I think was initiated by Machiavelli with this idea of the effectual truth. It's interesting that when he speaks of the effectual truth, in the first paragraph of the 15th chapter of *The Prince*, the same text we've been talking about. He uses that phrase only this once in all of his writing, he never uses it elsewhere, in any other book or even a letter. Nor did any other Italian in the whole Renaissance use this phrase, so effectual truth seems to be a Machiavellian invention. And the word *effectual* and *effect* turns up in the century after Machiavelli.

So effect is understood as something opposed to what an imagination is. See, imagination can be two things, it can be – and this is the way Plato and Aristotle understood it – the imagination of the truth of something that you see, so it's connected to nature. You imagine the tree as it is when it's perfect or complete. It may not be the way you see it, but the imagination is based on the way you see it. But for Machiavelli, it's not that way.

You do imagine things. So he, too, has an imaginary republic or an imaginary principality, but it's free of what you see. It's free of the visible, all the distinction between visible and intelligible. So what you see are facts, and facts say don't encourage you to look for the intelligible nature of the thing. The fact is already intelligible, which means it's not intelligible because you can't get around it. It's stubborn. It doesn't explain itself. So you just have to accept that.

And once you accept that, however, then your imagination is free of having to see something in order to imagine it. So this new kind of reason comes out of Machiavelli, and that is the reason that conceives something that isn't the case. Hobbes talks about the difference between prudence, which is based on what you see, and science, which is based on possibilities. So now science is freer from fact.

Once you acknowledge fact, you gain freedom from it, and so on the one hand, you're realistic and on the other hand, you're idealistic. And that I think captures the essence of modern philosophy. Some modern philosophers are known as empirical, based on fact, like Locke, and others as rational, based on reason, like Descartes. But actually, they're together. They're two prongs of the same movement. And that's what Machiavelli got started.

KRISTOL: And there were pre-Machiavellians, obviously, who were doubters of the orderliness of nature or of, you know, the forms or the ideas, or whatever version one wants of this kind of understanding of classes, and so forth.

But atomists and nominalists and all these other philosophers – they were real philosophers, I suppose – but they're different from Machiavelli because? So what does Machiavelli do or what's the understanding that makes him different from just – not *just* but these earlier doubters?

MANSFIELD: So Machiavelli thinks – that this new respect for fact and possible organization of reason makes possible change. So whereas pre-Machiavellian philosophers just said this just shows the difficulty of the imperfection of human understanding. The difficulty of understanding things. Philosophy teaches you that we don't know what we think we know, we think it's obvious but it isn't.

That isn't the lessons that he wants so the lesson that he draws is we've underestimated human possibilities up until now. That's because we've looked on man as under the authority and sort of dictates of nature. Nature is something eternal, it tells you what is permanent about our situation, but nature has been exaggerated and a substitution or alternative to nature can be formulated. And so that's what modern, say, rationalism tries to do.

It believes that philosophy has the purpose of changing our world and not just understanding it. For the pre-Machiavellian and pre-modern philosophers, the task of philosophy is to understand the world, and now, the new possibility is to change it. That's a very famous statement – not quite exactly in these words – by Karl Marx and his *Theses on Feuerbach*. But it states, really, the fundamental purpose of modern philosophy and, of course, Marx's is changing – I think the whole idea of philosophy as the agent of change comes out of Machiavelli.

This is philosophy, but it's a new philosophy. If it's philosophy, how can there a new philosophy? That's one question, you might say. Doesn't it still have to be concerned with eternal things, philosophy? Also, you can ask if philosophy is going to change itself, is this just a temporary solution? Because we face this question of Christianity and it's corruption and if we somehow resolve that and return to a freer and stronger way of living, then can we go back to the old idea of philosophy instead of just contemplating and not changing the world, the world now having changed? And that's very difficult, very difficult to see how it isn't a permanent change in philosophy that will be difficult, if not impossible, to reverse.

And so some people wonder about Machiavelli was this just a prudent device? Modernity was just something that would be a good thing for a while. We don't know quite how long, maybe for quite a long time but not forever. Or does philosophy always retain its perhaps fundamentally skeptical attitude even toward modernity?

And of course, the history of modernity, as it goes on and on, is to become more critical of itself. We find that modernity that begins in this great triumph of reason, of rational control. *The Mandragola* is a very good way to see it. We can control birth and family and make it do what it's supposed to do through our rational and prudent ways. Or is reason the slave of the passions? That was Hume. Or is reason what kills our creativity and turns us into dead men or last men? That's Nietzsche. Looking at this whole

project of modernity, one can wonder whether it doesn't turn on itself. And reproduce some of the same questions that Plato and Aristotle might have put to it when Machiavelli began.

KRISTOL: I guess the effectual truth, in fact, has the effects that Machiavelli and then his successors expect – it's a little hard to say that somehow people might dislike it or have an aesthetic distaste for it, or the unfortunate side effects that Rousseau and Nietzsche and all these others saw, but if it is, it is. Planes fly, and if people live the way they live, I guess one could say that – it's hard to say that he was wrong.

MANSFIELD: We're not going to give up our technology or our longer lives. Modern medicine, which was of such great interest to the early modern philosophers. That's what they thought philosophy could do, new philosophies could make us live longer. That's come about.

The new philosophy is science. Philosophy gives birth to modern science, and then science becomes separate from philosophy, now seems to have a motion of its own. It becomes quite critical of philosophy.

Science comes out of the rationalism or the conceptualism that was given birth by Machiavelli. And that kind of imagination is, of course, mainly mathematical. So modern science starts out as mathematical. Mathematical physics. That's what Galileo brought. Mathematical is a way of making our life more regular, more rational, less based on prejudice or superstition or – and this is perhaps the most interesting thing – less based on common sense.

The great enemy of science is common sense. Common sense says that the ordinary person knows better. You don't have to go to some fancy college to, you know, to have common sense, and in fact, it's better not to. What is, you could say, that would be another way to criticize Machiavelli's enterprise. What is the value of common sense still? And what you said, the objection you made, namely, that we can't go back, wouldn't that just be common sense? And not necessarily a scientific proof.

KRISTOL: It might also be the case that, as a practical matter, it's hard to go back. People get to like modern – the benefits of, the fruits of modern science and the benefits of modern economic growth.

I guess a separate question from – does Machiavelli give people still though in his thought a ground that stands apart from what is happening, to judge it and to think about the world, or not? Isn't that the self-forgetting side?

MANSFIELD: There is a self-forgetting side. That once you adopt the viewpoint of *the* world it's hard to get out of that. And to look at things from the standpoint of the next world or of the intelligible world – both of them turn out to be, perhaps, instrumental to *the* world. That's how you'll think of it. You'll think religion will make you better off in this world, and so will your understanding of nature. But on the other hand, you could say that the very word *effectual* invites disinterested critique, because what is the effect of modernity? Has it really turned out for the better altogether?

And one thing that modern science has done is to make it possible for man to destroy mankind, all mankind. With atomic weapons. So if that happens that will be a kind of a refutation, or the possibility of it's happening is always a question mark. You can't forget, you can't suppress. But besides all the benefits of modern medicine, which many people, including me, have gladly accepted.

We could also mention economics. The triumph of economics, if it is a triumph. Again, that there's a question is owing to Machiavelli. Because economics is based on necessity. It's the first premise of necessity, of what you get in the first course, baby course, or Economics 1 or 101, is that goods are scarce. So you begin from the view that the world – see that's the Machiavellian world – is characterized by scarcity. That means that nature isn't there to help you out. So how are you going to get out of this scarcity? Answer: economics. Economics will tell you how to do it freely but also effectively. So you have to consider not just demand and not just supply, but both.

You could say supply is a kind of oligarchical thing. That's what producers – the price that producers

want. And demand is democratic, that's what the consumer wants. So supply and demand give you a kind of mixed regime in which both suppliers and consumers, demanders, are satisfied. And that's what economics promises, a kind of harmony or regularity.

Economics thinks that the business cycle can be done away with if you act ahead of time and do what is necessary, you see, to forestall a coming recession. Now, it turns out that economics hasn't really succeeded in doing this but it does sort of produce a kind of alternation of recession and boom in which – and this is the way stock market people look at it – fear and greed operate.

The stock market sometimes goes down when everybody's afraid that you'll lose and it goes up when everybody gets greedy because you want to gain. So progress is based on this alternation between fear and greed, and fear keeps you from being too greedy and greed keeps you from being too afraid. So the two kind of counteract each other even though they're both bad in themselves. That's very Machiavellian.

KRISTOL: The net effect of it – I don't mean, you know, using, I guess, Machiavelli's term *effect*, I guess thinking about it though I didn't mean it that way. But the consequence of that is still an upward slope, like the stock market when you even out the ups and downs. We're more prosperous than our grandparents were.

MANSFIELD: That's right so you're not just level.

KRISTOL: That's a vindication, presumably, of the more Machiavellian type of modernity than an extremely rationally planned, managed-to-the-detail – That would be the argument, I suppose, when you really look at how the modern world works, it has more –

MANSFIELD: The modern world is not as regular as it tries to give the impression of being.

KRISTOL: Right, or the tradition coming out of Hobbes and some of the others, certainly the 19th-century rationalists. They don't seem to quite have been right that you could manage things as much as they thought. Machiavelli would have said, well, that's not – you can't but –

MANSFIELD: Reason can triumph, but not rationality, he would say, or not rationality in the human soul. Reason has to manipulate the rationality in the human soul. That's Machiavelli. Also Descartes, the founder of modern rationalism was very aware of the irrationality of the human soul. And in a way, you have to nourish your fears and your greed and feel them. And the way to succeed in the stock market is to be afraid when everyone else is greedy and be greedy when everyone else is afraid.

So but most people can't do that. So human rationality depends on human irrationality, you could say, and that's a Machiavellian understanding.

KRISTOL: Machiavelli's modern rationalism seems truer than the –

MANSFIELD: But economics, on the whole, is a great regularizer of necessity. So you don't have to kill people. So it turns your attention from political acquisition to economic, to acquisition of goods. In other words, your attention to things where there is more of a trade-off. In an economic acquisition, there's always a trade-off – that's the whole idea. There's always a price at which an exchange can occur. Whereas in political acquisition, there isn't, there's never a price really. Because political acquisition ends in war, and in war, there's a winner and a loser, and not a trade-off.

So economic acquisition makes life more regular, less exciting, but also less fatal and less sensational. Less cruel. Machiavelli believes in a certain basic minimum of cruelty that's necessary. And in economics, you can lose your shirt, but that's all. Then probably someone will take care of you. So modern life, you could say, starts out very tough in Machiavelli – he teaches you to be tough in both morals and politics. And it ends soft. We're much softer. We don't believe in capital punishment even. So that is a big change in the Machiavellian project but you could say it happens on Machiavellian grounds.

KRISTOL: But could be a sufficient change as to undermine the Machiavellian project if we're too soft to repulse pre-Machiavellian types, like believing Muslims who value death more than life. That would be one question one could raise, I suppose. Then there's the nuclear war, the flip side question, which is this has been a wonderful project but if it blows up all of mankind it was supposed to benefit whose state it was supposed to relive, that's not so great. Right? So I guess –

MANSFIELD: You can to be able to threaten war and even make war but please not nuclear war. And that's a difficult program, difficult to sustain. And it calls for a kind of Machiavellian prudence and that means it might not be there. Machiavellian, prudent statesmen are not always at the helm, borrowing from the Federalists.

KRISTOL: It also means the systems, which got set up, make it harder in a way to have such statesmen because they don't see things as clearly as Machiavelli.

MANSFIELD: Education makes you think that everything will be hunky-dory. So that means we really have to study Machiavelli more than we have been and more seriously.

KRISTOL: On the philosophic side – so that would be kind of the political-moral necessity study of Machiavellian. If only to keep the Machiavellian projects, I would say.

MANSFIELD: To keep it alive it needs to be resuscitated by Machiavelli. That's very true.

KRISTOL: And now on the philosophic side –

MANSFIELD: The philosophers need to look more closely at the foundations of modern philosophy.

KRISTOL: I guess the question one could raise is that common sense seems not to go away despite the efforts to overcome it and aren't trees still – isn't there something intelligible about saying or compelling even about saying there seem to be these kind of forms and genres and species?

MANSFIELD: And nature has some regularity. Isn't it somehow comforting that we have these different seasons and so on? That gives you a kind of pleasure, a certain variety in your life. And we see of course, many political movements coming back to nature, environmentalism, that suggests that maybe science goes too far or can go too far.

Of course, we think that there are scientific solutions for science going too far so we don't want to throw away science, we also don't want to question it very severely. But yes, we need to re-read Machiavelli, and also the pre-Machiavellians, let's say, Plato and Aristotle, Xenophon and other ancient writers whom Machiavelli opposed.

KRISTOL: On that note, a very ambitious assignment for everyone to take from this conversation. I thank you very much, this has been fascinating. Thank you, Harvey Mansfield, and thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]