

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

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Guest: Harvey Mansfield, professor, Harvard University

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I: The Democrats: Party of Progress (00:15 – 45:50)

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased to have as our guest today Harvey Mansfield, Professor of Government at Harvard. And we're going to discuss our parties.

Your first book, 50 years ago, was on statesmanship and party government, on the origins of party government, I guess, or the original defense of party government in the thought of Edmund Burke, and now you've returned to parties. So what's interesting about our parties?

MANSFIELD: Our parties? Well, we have two of them. That's a point to begin with. The universities seem to think there's only one. And it is the case that in America now there are pockets of party strength for one side or the other where you can live without having to tolerate the existence of people who disagree. But we do have two parties, and the past half-century or so they've divided electoral success pretty much 50-50.

So I think they're here to stay for the foreseeable future. I want to study, especially, the thought that's behind them. I'm interested in what they think – both sides – and also the kinds of people, the temperaments that go with being a Democrat or a Republican. So the thought –

KRISTOL: That's different from the political scientists that see them just as interest groups.

MANSFIELD: Yes, as representing different interests, each of them rather accurately. Well, if you're interested in the thought, then you have to face the fact that some thoughts are better than others. And that's, so you have to challenge the thinking of both sides and try to see which way of thinking is more viable. Or which will succeed and which won't.

Or in some, which is true and what is false. That takes you well beyond the fact-value distinction, which is an affliction of most political scientists. It also warns you of the character of the parties to behind with. They're interested in each other. They're not just two sets of preferences.

The political scientists like to borrow that term from economics. *Preferences*. As if it's a question of vanilla over chocolate. In politics, the people who like vanilla don't like the people who like chocolate, and they want to do away with chocolate. They're anti-chocolate. That's a political issue – say, abortion. Each side wants a kind of society in which abortion is possible or in which it is not. And so it's more than a preference, it's a view of the whole of the kind of society you want to live in. And these two wholes are at odds with each other.

Most political debate consists of an attack of the other side. For example, I listened to President Obama's State of the Union Address at the beginning of last year, and every single paragraph in that speech was

either against President Bush, who preceded him, or against the Republicans, who still oppose him. And of course, its the same with Republicans, they are after the Democrats. It's a kind of dialectic, and I think that those who don't look at the ideas and thoughts, which are behind it are, which are actually fully expressed in it – it's hard to miss – won't understand the politics of the two parties.

Now, it's also the case that the two parties have different ways of looking at both parties. So the Democrats are in favor of progress, and they try to impose their view of the two parties on both parties in such a way that the Republicans have a kind of diminished role as opposing progress and therefore bad, but perhaps also forcing progress to solve it's problems as it goes along and therefore to that small extent, helpful.

KRISTOL: Raising useful objections, occasionally. Ultimately yielding.

MANSFIELD: That's the role of the Republicans. And the Republicans, to some extent, fall in with this as conservatives. Conservatism, you might say, is the little brother of liberalism. It wouldn't exist without liberalism, to have something to combat.

It tends to be on the defensive, and the usual role of a Republican or a conservative is either to object forcefully, asking history to stop – William Buckley's famous phrase. Or to go along and compromise and say, "Well, we all believe in this now, more or less, and so we'll cavil a little, but we won't fundamentally object." That's the view of the Democrats but the Republicans have their view, I think, which gives them a more central role. They are – and this will surprise people, maybe, I think – the party of virtue.

They believe that some people are better than others, and this makes them exclusive. Not that they want to exclude people because, after all, they live in a democracy and somehow this has to be made compatible with democracy, but the people who earn their living or do better are entitled to greater rewards. And so, there's a certain picture of hierarchy that Republicans have in their minds, and they think our society on the whole is just or it's just to the extent that people get the merit, or the rewards, or the deserts that they earn.

KRISTOL: I suppose something like equal opportunity allows the Republicans to marry hierarchy with democracy.

MANSFIELD: That's the idea very much. And this strangely enough, I think, this division between those who are in favor of virtue – well, the Democrats are not in favor of vice, but they're in favor of inclusiveness. That's a word, which they like to use all the time, and that means including the people who aren't quite as meritorious – let's put it that way – as others.

They have their place, too, and especially, for the Democrats, it's more inclusive to include those whom there's some reason for not including. They're in that somewhat paradoxical position. This could remind one who studied a little bit of political philosophy of the view of Aristotle that every society is divided into democracy and oligarchy, and every society has things in which everyone is equal and things in which everyone is unequal.

And sometimes the democracy predominates, and sometimes the oligarchy, and this is sort of modernized or made more democratic by Tocqueville, who makes the distinction between those – these are the two great parties in all free societies. First, those who want to extend the power of the people, and those you want to restrain it. Republicans look on the party conflict in that way, and therefore, they are more tolerant than the Democrats.

The Democrats, believing in progress, think that well, as we were saying, conservatives have their role, but in the long run there's no real need for them. And because progress means progress towards rationality and equality – those two things, those two things together – as progress is against superstition and prejudice and inveterate custom.

So, there doesn't have to be, in the final picture, perhaps, a conservative party. Whereas the conservatives are much more aware of the constant opposition to giving merit it's due. It's in the interest, you could say, of everyone who doesn't have it to oppose it. So they're not so surprised at the continued existence of liberals.

KRISTOL: Diversity seems to me to be – if I had to pick one term that's sort of the liberals or progressives are for, it seems to be diversity, which is a little different, maybe, from progress or equality. Or is it not? Is it just a way of dressing up equality to look more or less uniform, I don't know? Or is that a way of being from many things, but no ranking, no order, I guess, no hierarchy?

MANSFIELD: All that, yes.

KRISTOL: Talk about diversity, multiculturalism.

MANSFIELD: Diversity is a present day face of progressivism. Progressivism begins with the distinction between societies that don't progress and those that do, societies that are stuck. Those are for the most part uncivilized societies. Civilization allows you to get better, requires you to get better.

They make a big distinction between the uncivilized and the civilized. So the most famous liberal, perhaps, John Stuart Mill, went along with that distinction. He said, "Despotism is a perfectly legitimate way for civilized countries to deal with" – I think he said, barbaric or savage countries. Some such pejorative term, he used.

Now, progress has progressed beyond the distinction between civilization and uncivilized. Civilized and uncivilized. And it did this through the notion of culture. So culture takes us a giant step towards diversity. Culture was a 19th-century concept. I think first brought up by Kant, who was almost in the 19th century. It was developed in the 19th century, and then got passed along to anthropology and the 20th century.

Societies all have cultures. Culture is a way of eroding or even erasing the distinction between civilized and uncivilized. Everyone has a culture, and you shouldn't be ashamed of staying where you are because the view against staying where you are is just a prejudice like other prejudices. Turns out progress turns on itself, and it becomes more progressive to stop believing in progress than to continue to believe in it. The most progressive progressives are those that believe in the diversity of cultures, each of them equal because – this goes with the fact-value distinction, the values are not a matter of knowledge or science, you don't know that. You don't know that, say, the European Americans were better than the Indians that they replaced and fought.

So, we don't know that it's progress to live as we do now instead of as the Indians did with teepees. Well, they didn't even have horses before the white men came. That's progress undermining itself, and you see that very much today in diversity. Diversity – you're right – attacks a notion of hierarchy and even of authority. It's as if a society could be so equal that every opinion that arises is entitled to as much respect as any other and that it can't make any decisions because it hasn't any one with authority to make decisions.

That would be a picture of the final state or final condition of progress that progressives want. They, for the most part, don't think about this. For them, progress is just more equality, and perhaps, it's sometime will have enough and will insist that the opinions of this point, at this point, are the correct ones and should be made authoritative. But they don't know what that point is.

KRISTOL: Don't you think – they *do* think certain opinions are retrograde and not to be tolerated or barely tolerated if they're opinions that involve inequality of gender, the sexes, or obviously, races or other old-fashioned views that we've moved beyond? So does the diversity a superficial –

MANSFIELD: Yes, it is superficial, but everything is superficial, according to them. If you believe that all things are relative, then the preferences – that's just part of the fact that the preference for civilization is no stronger, no truer for barbarism or savagery. If you believe in progress, you have to believe that progress is better than lack of progress and the people that join you in this, other progressives, are better than the reactionaries and the conservatives.

So you're right, they do have an opinion that some people are authoritative and are better than others. But they don't like to trumpet that fact. They're sort of embarrassed or would be if they ever thought of it or if it were put to them. It isn't sufficiently put to them. They need to be challenged more than they are. It's perfectly clear in the universities that diversity means a kind of sameness. At Harvard, recently, the administration mounted an attack on the Final Clubs – those are Harvard's fraternities – as being based on same-sex.

Well, those poor fellows, if only that had been in the marriage business, same-sex would have been a great thing. But since they're not, to put it mildly, in the business of marriage, it was a bad thing. And they were really being bullied – they still are – into accepting women because all institutions having to do with Harvard have to be mixed-sex, or both sex represented, maybe even equally. So that's the kind of difficulty that they get into. They call this diversity, but it's really sameness.

KRISTOL: It's diversity within progressivism. They don't tolerate the diversity of the non-progressives or the retrograde.

MANSFIELD: No, they don't. That's it, because those people are old-fashioned, prejudiced, and superstitious.

KRISTOL: Why do you think – it is striking that liberals decided, in the last few years, I think, to re-appropriate and use the term *progressive*? They think that's more – I don't know, maybe, liberalism was politically damaged so much.

MANSFIELD: The "L" word. Nixon did a job on the word *liberal*. It came to mean soft on crime or maybe, just plain soft. Yeah, they switched back to the term *progressive*. Also, I suppose there's the danger of libertarians are being confused with – libertarians who are also, in a way, liberals though usually not called so. I don't know the full reason behind this, but you're right there is this kind of return to progressivism.

KRISTOL: They really want to be the spokesman for progress. That seems important. Is that the core of the Democrats really, that they're on the side of progress, on the side of history?

MANSFIELD: Now, progress has these characteristics. In the first place, it has a kind of political organization as opposed to an intellectual one. Intellectually, you can define democracy as progress towards equality. But that always means that we don't have democracy now, it's in the future sometime when everybody will be more equal than they are at present now. And we're eager to get to this future, but it's also important for us to insist that we don't have it now.

Politically, democracy could be defined as the rule of the majority, as each person gets one vote, we're all equal. So the majority, as it is now, is the democratic authority and needs to be respected. And this means that democracy exists now and doesn't in the future. The trouble is that Republicans sometimes win the elections so that then that means that democracy equals Republicanism or conservatism, at least for a time, or at least in part. This has to be explained as something like "false consciousness," which is a communist term for opinions that shouldn't exist but somehow do.

But still, the Democrats have taken to fighting elections therefore, obviously. This means they conceded that democracy exists, to some extent, right now, and they have to win the next election therefore, and they're rather skilled at winning elections. They're more, in generally, more politically skilled than

Republicans or conservatives, which goes with they're being a little less scrupulous than Republicans. They're good at winning elections, and Harry Hopkins had this famous, or maybe this is a legend, this famous formula of "tax, tax, tax; spend, spend; elect, elect, elect."

That was the political formula of the New Deal, which meant the taxing the rich and electing Democrats and then spending money on benefits for the people. So that progressivism has come to mean these benefits brought to them by government as entitlements. And a benefit becomes an entitlement when it's yours *for sure* and it cannot be taken away.

This brings up the irreversibility of progress. That's, perhaps, it's most important feature. Progress is progress when it's *definite*. And when one can no longer go back to lack of progress or what use to be, because then if that were the case, then it would just be back-and-forth. But progress is getting away from back-and-forth to a new plateau above all previous experience. And so President Obama when he introduced his Affordable Care Act said, "I'm not the first President to be concerned with the healthcare issue, but I want to be the last." This would put health beyond partisan politics, in which it's no longer an issue. In a way, maybe, he has succeeded to some extent – it will always be, somehow, the responsibility of government to ensure the health of the American people.

But obviously, it doesn't do away with controversy, and in fact, the Democrats are very good at winning elections because they have to be, they have to keep winning, they have to defend their supposedly irreversibly progress. Which they do with considerable success because these entitlements are designed to be permanent, in that once you have it, it becomes a right that you insist on and is your property, so to speak. And who are they to monkey with my property, trying to take it away? Takeaways is something that labor unions know about. To reduce wages is a takeaway, and it's also to go against the force of history. History ensures somehow – take a complicated argument, I think – that progress is irreversible, but it continues this way.

Another feature of progressivism is the reliance on experts. That's very important. I said that progress means more equality, but also more rationality. So you might not think equality and rationality go together, especially when you consider rationality promotes experts and most people aren't experts. They're non-experts, like us, say.

But no, rationality will show you that equality is more rational, more reasonable. It's more reasonable not to make distinctions among people than to make such distinctions. They'll like it better being treated equally than they will when some of them are treated unequally. Not everyone will like it, but those are the natural Republicans, you could say, those who like being treated unequally because they know that they'll be on top.

The people who might have some doubt about whether they will be on top are willing to settle for equality. So therefore, it becomes more rational to run a political system or a society on equality. Well, that's just one argument, in general. Rationality is expressed in the ascendancy of experts, and the Democrats make a lot of use of social science and especially, of economics to argue that their solutions to social problems – namely, spending more on government benefits – are the best and the most rational, endorsed by the most intelligent experts, most accomplished experts.

They've particularly fastened on economists. Here, I think that the role of Keynesian – Lord Keynes and Keynesian economists – I think, is very important in the history of progressivism. Keynes showed that it's rational to spend government money to give people benefits. On the whole, the old attitude of an economist, which you might say, was in favor of saving, thrift, everything that goes with when you say someone is *economical* or economically oriented – that means he's conservative, he's a natural conservative. He wants to save rather than spend.

But Keynes showed it's more intelligent and even more moral to spend rather than to save. That's the great moral and political lesson of Keynes, that he inculcated. I think that has given expert recognition to the government programs of the Democrats and has been very important for their success.

KRISTOL: So the liberals, progressives – it does seem to have created this medley of institutions and attitudes that's pretty powerful. The deference to experts, entitlements, rights, the Supreme Court, that kind of expertise, too, where we let them decide on family structures, etc.

MANSFIELD: That's a very important – the Supreme Court, too. Judicial review, the changing of the Constitution from its original appearance of a structure of process to a set of principles or policies, even, which must not be violated.

I think that is part of the irreversibility of progress, the gradual transformation of a constitution from "this is how you pass a law" to "these are the laws that must be passed." And judicial review, the Warren Court, and so on, and the liberal position on Supreme Court decisions sort of gradually narrows the range of choice that a free society has.

You might think that you can have a free society with same-sex marriage and without, and that's a free choice of the people to make, but no, it turns out that you can't a free society if same sex marriage isn't allowed or if abortion isn't allowed. Those are the two most egregious recent specifications. The Constitution begins to specify things that you must follow and believe as opposed to setting down conditions for compromise and for moderation and for wisdom.

KRISTOL: And apart from the fact that people like you and me might not like this vision of politics, particularly, because of some retrograde views we have or whatever, what stands in its way, I guess? Maybe nothing stands in its way?

MANSFIELD: A good deal stands in its way, and I think it's heading towards a crisis, I think. In the first place, the debt. Just the cost of it. It think it's really coming into question whether the Republicans who opposed to New Deal from the very start weren't right. I think they're being set up for vindication. You can't give a democratic people the habit of a government that spends for benefits without their coming to shirk the duty of paying for those benefits. So the deficit spending, which is now endemic in our government – spending more than you have, therefore, borrowing from the future – there is a certain obvious sense in which that can't go on forever.

And in Obama's administration, our debt has gone from \$9 trillion to \$18 trillion, can the next Democratic President do that too? Double it. And he's used this so-called "quantitative easing" to hold down government interest payments and therefore make the debt less onerous. Now, he's just having to move off that – that's an emergency measure, which becomes routine and becomes expected. How long is that going to work? Well, it isn't working.

So the Democrats have been very, very inventive in finding ways to postpone the reckoning. But at some point, I think it will come. We've seen that in Greece. Greece is a small and weak country, nothing like the United States of America, of course, but still there is an example of a people that democratically voted itself into bankruptcy, with great loss of wealth now and with lots of trouble. And it's being presided over by a socialist – I think that's a paradox; I can come back to later. That's also interesting.

So the debt is – and the debt is – that difficulty is added to by the reluctance of people to pay taxes. The Democrats now admit this. I think it was Walter Mondale, in 1984, who was the last Democrat to run for office or run for the presidency and say that he was going to raise taxes for everybody. Now, it's only on the rich. That's always been constant for the Democrats. But the rich they define as over \$250,000 in income per year. That's a fairly extensive definition of rich, but still leaves a whole lot of people untouched and a whole lot of money untaxed, or less taxed below that level.

And the Republicans, too, have used that as a tactic – this is their most skillful tactic, the cutting of taxes, in a way, which you might say is irresponsible because they know very well that spending won't be cut sufficient to pay for these tax cuts. But still, it stops feeding the beast and puts the pressure of necessity on the welfare state in a way that, I think, some kind of crisis will come.

This doesn't mean that people will easily or joyfully give up their government benefits. So the political scientists say the welfare state is here to stay. My friend Paul Pierson at Berkeley has a famous book on the subject, on how difficult it is to disentangle the benefits and to deprive people of the benefits they're used to.

You won't get polls saying, "I'm willing to give up my Social Security and so on," or Medicare. No, you won't. But still, and this is one reason why polls aren't sufficient, because they express wishes, and things might happen contrary to your wishes.

KRISTOL: Decisions you might have to make under pressure?

MANSFIELD: Like the socialist government of Greece, which under pressure had to return to the same austerity that it objected to when it was done by previous governments. So that's the debt.

Another point is bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is a delivery system of government benefits, and that is incompetent, in a word. I've seen recent studies by Nick Eberstadt about this. How has the Great Society succeeded? Has it succeeded in the War on Poverty? Have we won that war or not? Strangely enough, according to the government figures, we haven't. In fact, we haven't even made any progress since it started in 1965 or the Lyndon Johnson Administration. It's a sign of the incompetence of the welfare state that it can't even measure what it has done. So Eberstadt thinks yes, it has pretty well cured poverty in the most deprived sense of the word – nobody's starving – but at huge cost and with great inefficiency. Another example would be the return that you get on your Social Security that you pay, and you get a very poor return that's compared in what you might get by investing in the stocks and bonds.

And then to the numbers of people who work in the bureaucracy and their behavior. Look at the public employee unions – those are civil servants, but somehow their benefits seem to come ahead of the benefits of the rest of us. They've done quite well, and their reluctance to give up their pensions, their very generous pensions, or even to reduce them somewhat is terrific. And this sets a bad example.

One might remark, too, on the general decline of unions in the private sector, this is another factor, I think, in the problems of progressivism. All those difficulties that go with the delivery of the benefits, I think, are very considerable and the kind of ingratitude, which people show toward them. When the government is totally responsible for health, then you'll get in touch with your Congressman when something goes bad for you. It becomes – instead of it's being the nature of human life and something we have to tolerate and sustain on our own, and also on our own responsibility, it's something that we can blame somebody else for. That's leads to a kind of surly disposition in the people – we see this in the approval ratings and the way in which government is held in such low esteem.

Our government is our most valuable common possession. Our government and our Constitution. Our government is a self-government. If you have no government, then you have anarchy. That's terrible. You don't want that. If you're going to have a government, it has to be self-government, and it has to be run in such a way that each self feels responsible for it. That means in general, limited government.

The limited comes in, because if government tries to take over total responsibility for your life – cradle to grave, as they said in the welfare state – then there's nothing left for you to do and that makes you bored and annoyed and surly. And we see a lot of that in the American people now. They're not as grateful as they should be. So that's problem number two.

Problem number three is, I think, in foreign affairs – the weakness that progressives show in foreign parts.

Their relativism works against their belief in American, national interest. So when Obama said, “I believe in American exceptionalism the same way the Brits believe in British exceptionalism.” So all countries are at the same level, except those who try to pretend to be on a higher level, and those, you could say, who are actually on a lower level because of their pretensions and the violence and imperialism which results.

That means, then, it’s very hard to defend your national interest as having some status, or I mean, why – why isn’t the other fellow defending his national interest? I mean, Obama can’t give up on the idea that America should defend its own interest, and yet he also can’t espouse it with much enthusiasm. So we see apologies and so on. And in general, foreign policy weakness.

This has come over the progressives, especially since the late 60s, with the protests against the Vietnam War. You could say that the Democrats have become a peace party. And that their belief in progress forces them to believe that the world is becoming more progressive and therefore, more peaceful, more harmonious. There’s less and less reason to combat.

This is one reason why they’re so fond of the issue of environmentalism. Environmentalism tells us that we’re all vulnerable, all of us equally, even the billionaires. They still have to breathe air, don’t they? And so on. All countries are in it together. So the climate question goes together with peace, so we need peace, after all, if we’re going to work together to save our climate or environment. So this forces the Democrats to become more and more a peace party.

You could say America has lost three wars – Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, to the extent that those are lost – because of the peace party. The strength of the peace party in our politics. So, I think those are three ways in which progress is coming into a kind of crisis. I can’t predict. I’m not a predictor, but I mean one can point to trends or facts, which can’t help but cause trouble.

II. The Republicans: Party of Virtue (45:50 – 1:15:11)

KRISTOL: So progress is coming to crisis, and the welfare state has all these problems that you’ve pointed out, and other conservatives have done a pretty good job, I think, on some of the contradictions of the welfare state and modern liberalism and progressivism.

But of course, you can’t beat something with nothing, I guess, and that raises the question of what conservatives or Republicans are for or what are the alternatives to the welfare state? I want to ask about the positive alternative to the progressive welfare state.

But I guess before that, what’s the answer to the obvious objection if the welfare state is supported by experts and supported by history apparently, and supported by progress. How does one actually argue against that? Especially progress? Aren’t we all for progress? If the progressives are institutionalizing progress, what’s the objection?

MANSFIELD: Well, the progressives have stopped institutionalizing progress, and they’ve become enemies of progress because they have no reason that they can give now on why progress is good. Since good is all relative. Since one culture is equal to another, why would we go from one to another and with all the effort that’s required?

Well, there is a Republican progress, which you can find in a speech by Abraham Lincoln in 1859 in Wisconsin to a state fair, addressed to farmers. And he praises American farmers. They’re intelligent. They work in such a way as to always be looking for a better way to do something. So they make a distinction between doing a job and doing it well. That’s an important distinction, and you can find it in Plato’s *Republic*. You’re not really doing your job unless you’re doing it well, and everybody knows it.

I think that's a kind of progress, which doesn't imply that it's ordained or foretold by history. And it's one that goes with the virtue of an individual. Lincoln is saying the American farmer is not a serf or a peasant in a constant reactionary society that never moves and never goes anywhere. There is that kind of progress, and I think that's still possible and still something to be in favor of.

And that goes with a Republican notion of virtue. And that's still alive today. If you're a homeowner, like me, you have a lot of acquaintance with workers of different kinds, plumbers and carpenters and so on, who fix things. Those people are constantly making remarks about the work that has been done, which they encounter. Usually pejorative remarks, and they're quite critical. But they know the difference between what's good work and what isn't. They can give you the signs of it and allow you, gradually, to learn something about that. But the spirit is there and still alive, I think, in American society and still very important.

KRISTOL: So it's citizens sort of doing the work for themselves and doing it well as opposed to being taken care of by the welfare state or being clients – that's the word people use these days – clients of different government programs and so forth.

MANSFIELD: A client is something like a serf. So that's not a free condition. Yeah, it's a passive role.

KRISTOL: Conservatives can be for progress of a kind, but not determined by or guaranteed by history, obviously.

MANSFIELD: Or by society or by some grand mechanism or by a government program, which is a mechanism. Something that still leaves freedom and virtue. Virtue and freedom go together, because you don't have virtue unless you do something freely and you don't have freedom unless you do it with virtue, because if you use freedom licentiously for bad ends, to corrupt yourself, than you'll lose it.

So that's – it's easy to become a slave. Even a slave to money. And so I think the objection that most people have to what I said about Republicans being a party of virtue is that no, they're the party of money. I think it's true if you're interested in money excessively or even reasonably, you're more likely to be a Republican more than a Democrat. Although Democrats make money, too.

But Republicans emphasize that it takes virtue to make money, and therefore, money that is made in our society, they think is deserved. This is a just society, except for when government intervenes on the side of one party or another. You get what you – from the market. The market is a kind of interesting – also a mechanism, a non-governmental mechanism. The market is a way of distributing things or allowing things to be distributed, democratically, or in a way democratically, because you hit it rich when people decide that your product is just a little bit better than anyone else's, or newer.

In that way, it encourages trendiness, and it advances – in quotations – in a way that's doubtful, especially from the standpoint of a free society, because it puts you at the mercy of changes that you're not in control of. And so liberals will use that argument to say that the market needs to be corrected by government – trouble is that the correction tends to remove it or to give you the opinion that nothing ever has to be as it is. Or ought to be as it is. Everything needs to be corrected by government.

So the market is a kind of irrational way of providing an alternative to too much rationalism in government. Or it's an irrational way of accommodating our irrational desires – fashion, style, things like that which are hard to defend reasonably, but bad if decided by some authority that claims to be expert or scientific or rational. So the market is a resource of virtuous people in that it allows chance to have its way. But wherever chance is possible then, too, virtue is possible.

KRISTOL: It seems like, maybe, the market is more of a playing field where people can, at least, take a shot at success, and of course, sometimes, it's arbitrary or good people fail and foolish ideas succeed for

awhile in the market, but still it's better for people's character to compete in the market than to be given things by the government. That's the conservative idea.

MANSFIELD: That's right, yes. And there is such a thing as character. And that applies that we have such a thing as a soul. Whether or not divine or immortal, nonetheless a soul that identifies each person as himself, in which you can shape, or is partly shaped for you by your family and also by your temperament, your nature, your genes, whatever. You can shape, you can control it, and this allows you to control your life.

Character is a very important word, and it shouldn't be replaced by *personality* or *self*, because it tells you that it's within your capacity to govern yourself.

KRISTOL: Self-government in the individual?

MANSFIELD: Yes, we're beginning to work towards self-government. Self-government in the individual. So character is a very important thing. And how do you get character? By teaching yourself virtue, but also by adopting certain habits.

Conservatives stress the importance of habits or, you might say, conventions or manners. There are certain conventional ways of doing things, which are virtuous to uphold, sometimes to violate because what's usually done can get in the way of what ought to be done in an emergency or a special situation. But, for the most part, a virtuous person obeys conventions, is respectful of conventions. So it always used to be a feature of conservatism that it was interested in conventions, in the way that things ought habitually to be done.

Good manners. You show your virtue often by your manners. Those are superficial, but they're superficial signs of something that can be deep. So when you meet somebody you pay attention to them – that sort of thing and so that means that a conservative or a Republican is somewhat, usually somewhat *stiff* or *uptight*. These are sort of words that liberals might use, and I think correctly. It might often be the case that a Democrat makes a better dinner companion than a Republican does, but a Republican might make a better spouse. Someone you can rely on who's trustworthy, who won't always be surprising you in a possibly nasty way. So manners and conventions are part of virtue and also part of the makeup of Republicans and conservatives.

KRISTOL: I suppose conservatism sometimes just becomes just a defense of the old manners and conventions, losing the connection to character and self-government. That would be traditionalism, I guess, for its own sake, or for, you know, defense of conventions because we're accustomed to them or they've existed a long time.

MANSFIELD: Conservatism has its perversions, same as progressives. Well, the thing is that progressivism becomes identified with its perversions, and I suppose that can happen with conservatism, as well, as we see with Donald Trump. A perverse character, if there ever was one.

KRISTOL: I think he seems not to be interested in the self-government of citizens. He is very liberal or progressive in the sense of "I can do better" –

MANSFIELD: I can get you a better deal.

KRISTOL: Right. "Trust me, I'll cut the deals." Not about letting citizens govern themselves, that's not Trump's vision, I would say. Maybe it shows a weakness of the Republicans today that they are tempted by Trump, that they don't rebel against it, as "Who's this rich guy to tell us how to take care of things for us?"

MANSFIELD: They are too partial to business or businessmen and making deals and negotiating. That's true. Trump never volunteers to fight. And he doesn't use that word, which the Democrats like to use – Al Gore for example, "I'll fight for you." Meaning, "I'll talk for you." So, yeah he'll fight for us in the way of he'll make deals for us, we all know that he's good at that because he's told us many times.

KRISTOL: It does seem that the Tea Party spirit was so much more one of constitutionalism and self-government, at least, in some, rhetorically. I guess one could worry that the susceptibility of Trump shows that was – I don't know – maybe it wasn't thought through as much or as deeply embedded as one hoped. Let us have limited government, let us govern ourselves.

I think the Tea Party is a revealing metaphor – it's not a metaphor, but a revealing historical incident that people really appealed to. I don't know how exactly where that came from, but I guess, it is spontaneous action by citizens.

MANSFIELD: Not legal.

KRISTOL: But laying the predicate for a constitutional system later.

MANSFIELD: The Tea Party believes in liberty as intractability. "Get out of my way. Leave me alone." So it has a kind of hostility to government massage. This is a definite part of human nature that we have a resistance to what is reasonable, because reasonable always turns out to mean some kind of imposition that you don't like and to being bossed around. I think humans do have this.

Then, the Tea Party wants to connect this to the Constitution, but the Constitution is a government, the constitution of a government, and it doesn't have the set yeses and noes in it, really, that the Tea Party wants. So it makes a kind of direct appeal to the Constitution, forgetting the Constitution sets up Congress and the presidency and the judiciary to get us the things that we want. It's more complicated than "I see this in the Constitution, therefore I must have it, and that's what it means."

They do have this great appreciation for the Constitution, but it's not a very profound one. And it's really quite wrong in overlooking the complication or the complexity and the difficulty of self-government.

KRISTOL: But the rebellion against the sort of nanny state, the welfare state telling you what to do, that, maybe, is a precondition occurring to a kind of constitutionalism and self-government that would at least be –

MANSFIELD: An irrational condition to a rational response.

KRISTOL: And it was true historically. There was a Tea Party before there was a Declaration, and there was a Declaration before there was a Constitution.

MANSFIELD: And a Declaration with some very famous signatures, followed by a Constitution with still more famous Founders. Trouble is do we see that presently in the Republican Party? No, probably not. Better to stick with our Constitution as we have it. As we have it at present.

KRISTOL: But the Tea Party says it's a return to the original Constitution so in that respect they're fine, because they don't want any new constitutions. They get to have an occasional rebellion against the –

MANSFIELD: Not really revolutionaries.

KRISTOL: Just against the recent authorities of progressivism and liberalism, really in a way. What you need to overturn that authority to restore the older one, I suppose, they would say.

So what about self-government though? Can that be made an attractive program? Is it too hard? Habits of virtue, good character? How does that compete with the benefits from government and deferring to experts and feeling like you're on the side of history? What about feeling like you're on the side of history, in particular? I'm always struck that people want to be – it does seem attractive to people.

MANSFIELD: What you're saying is you're fundamentally the status quo. History is the status quo, is movement, or in motion, and you can be yourself by changing as things change.

So Harvard now talks all the time about change. They've forgotten about *veritas*, their former motto, which they still print, but they're true motto is *muta veritas*. Keeping up with change. So this is the progressive view of the Constitution, the living Constitution. To live means to be in history. And to be in history means to always to change. So this word *change*, which seems so neutral and hardly something that you would rally behind, is used as a slogan for a rally. Hope and change, as if change goes with hope. It might go with fear.

That's characteristic of conservatives' fear of change. I think it's better to put yourself on the side of the good, the virtuous, of the irrepressibility of the good. We as humans are always looking for what is good, and that's, I think, fundamentally more powerful than looking for what is powerful.

KRISTOL: I guess freedom is connected to the good, right? Freedom seems to be an easier thing to hang onto than the good?

MANSFIELD: That's true. Also, there's another word in there, the *great*, which is not the same thing as good for some reason. Freedom goes with great, because you use your freedom. Good perhaps, too much limits your freedom or guides it in a compulsive way. Whereas greatness has more of you in it, or more of us. So we want a country that's great. Great and good. Was that Jimmy Carter who put those two together? We can't be great without being good. That's the delusion.

KRISTOL: That's a false Tocqueville quote, right?

MANSFIELD: Yes it is. He didn't believe any such foolish thing. So freedom goes with great and good. Let's put them both together, and that I think is more attractive than freedom as power, when power is understood merely as being in accord with the times.

And that's fundamentally an unprogressive view. What you're saying is that what is inhuman is stronger than what is human. We can't help but change, and so to keep up with that we have to keep up with "history". And be on the right side of it – that means on the side of the power not on the side of the virtue.

KRISTOL: I guess they try to reconcile that with saying – this is a favorite quotation, I think, of President Obama, but others have used it too – that the arc of history bends towards justice. There are different versions of this, I think. But therefore, you can be on the side of history, but also on the side of justice, not just succumbing to history.

MANSFIELD: Sure, that's what they say. That justice as understood, and with a power of government attached to it, is stronger than injustice, but then the injustice is – looks more and more like freedom. As the ability to rebel, or to be different, or to be diverse. People get bored with the kind of good that comes automatically and that you don't have to make any effort to achieve. Freedom and virtue have on their side the contingency of human life and that our lives are not made for us, and it's not good to believe that.

KRISTOL: Either as an individual or as a nation.

MANSFIELD: Either as an individual or as a nation. Therefore, history – there isn't a capital "H" to history. History is, at least, in part what we can make of it. And it will always be divided, too, between winners

and losers. Losers aren't always losers. They can be vindicated later on, and the winners, the same thing.

KRISTOL: I always thought Buckley didn't get enough credit, and I think I and my friends are probably guilty of this a little. Because there was something about "standing athwart history, yelling stop" – well, that can't really be governing agenda, it's so negative, you might say, and out of touch with contemporary America, and conservatism need to be more sophisticated, etc. etc. And there's some truth to all that, I suppose.

But I think he really did a huge service by just saying that at the beginning of the first conservative popular magazine. Somewhat popular magazine. *National Review*. Just sort of the boldness of being willing to – I don't know how much he thought it through honestly and how much it was an instinct, almost. You know? Maybe he'd read some deep stuff about how we shouldn't be on the side – that history doesn't work necessarily in favor of human freedom or deferring to history isn't good for the cause of freedom or virtue. It was striking that he said that in 1955, that he thought that was a key thing to say at the beginning –

MANSFIELD: His Christianity helped. It gave him the courage to say that even if it wasn't formulated. That was a wonderful thing, yes. I don't know whether you might say that history is the fundamental enemy of freedom today. Science is another one. The two of them get together, and both try to do their best to oppose the virtue of the human soul.

KRISTOL: And self-government as something that's always necessary. So let's just close with the Founders, maybe, and you mentioned Lincoln. But the Founders believed in progress, I think. Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, they were – progress in political science. Economic, scientific, technological progress. For them self-government is an experiment.

MANSFIELD: So that makes it interesting, yes. Therefore, not determined. Can we do it? We won't necessarily succeed, we don't know that. History is not necessarily on our side.

KRISTOL: I think that's important.

MANSFIELD: History is against us. We're standing against history. The history of republics is terrible, it's deplorable, none of them have survived. Even the greatest one that ever existed, the Roman Republic, became an empire through its own corruption. What can we do against this?

So in a way, they did say a stop to history. I think Buckley's phrase is vindicated in the Founders. Yes. Can we succeed in this great experiment? And that's what American exceptionalism is. We are doing something on behalf of mankind, not just for ourselves. And it's not to make everyone better, but it's to make everyone an example by which each could do better in his own way. That's a better way of phrasing it. It's not imperialism or nation-building even; it's setting an example and providing a model by which other countries can be improved.

So that's the basis for a strong foreign policy and still one that aims at, promotes peace through the spread of self-government.

KRISTOL: That's a good note on which to end, I think. A hopeful note, but also a challenge or a charge, maybe, to conservatives to articulate the case for self-government at home, which is also a case for self-government abroad, in a more indirect way, I suppose you're saying.

MANSFIELD: That would be the trick.

KRISTOL: But I mean that we don't think it's just going to be America. American exceptionalism doesn't mean that America will remain the only republic for hundreds of years.

MANSFIELD: We're the first. If we succeed. But others might improve, might surpass us. That's within possibility.

KRISTOL: And we can help them, hopefully. Thank you, Harvey, for this very interesting conversation about our parties, and thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]