

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

**Guest:** Harvey Mansfield, professor, Harvard University

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### **I: On Crime and Mysteries (0:15 – 22:20)**

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome back to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased to be joined again by Harvey Mansfield, Professor of Government at Harvard, student and interpreter of the great books.

I thought today maybe we'd discuss some not-so-great books, or very good books that one can learn a lot from, books that aren't the greatest books, I think, and enjoy them and benefit from them. I know you do, so I thought I'd ask you about what books do you enjoy reading? What books would you recommend to other that aren't Plato or Machiavelli or Heidegger or something daunting like that?

MANSFIELD: I enjoy books about crime. Mysteries. They are rewarding, and they're fun to read and they're not as demanding as a great book. You can get a few little interesting things out of them. Looking at books on crime, there are hundreds of authors because they're so popular. I thought I would mention just two or three. Crime is, crime is interesting. I think that's one point to begin from.

Modern crime stories begin with, I guess, Sherlock Holmes, and Sherlock Holmes led a bored life except when he was confronted with a crime, presented a puzzle. And so off he would go with his friend Watson. "Watson, the game's afoot!" Something that gave him interest in life. The 19th century was very preoccupied with boredom, or ennui.

Crime is interesting to us – especially murder. Murder seems to be a modern fear. Thomas Hobbes, 17th-century writer, spoke of "the fear of violent death" as the most powerful passion. Not just the fear of death, but violent death. And that doesn't mean from being crushed by a building or whatever, but being murdered, being killed by another human being. That is somehow very, very fearful.

There are two difficulties with this, and one is "who done it?", and the other is "how do you catch him?" So, this is also interesting because it's concerned with justice. For Aristotle, there are two kinds of justice: distributive – what is the just way to distribute benefits or good things – and the other is retributive – that is, the justice that comes from paying the penalty for a crime. He notes that this punitive justice, punishing justice, has a certain resemblance to commercial justice in that you're trying to make things come out even.

So that's the phrase "pay the penalty for your crime," you're going to try and make things come out evenly the way they were before. If you've got a "who done it," that means it's a mystery. Here's a crime, a murder, and it's a puzzle. So it's an intellectual thing. But, also, since it's concerned with justice and punitive justice, you want to find out who did it.

So it's not just a puzzle that you're interested in finding out, but you have a very strong, even a passionate, motive. The desire for justice, especially punitive justice, is extremely strong in human beings. It's a kind of revenge. Punitive justice is a kind of civilized or refined revenge.

KRISTOL: But on behalf of society?

MANSFIELD: On behalf of society, not personal. Society takes over from personal revenge and has its own kind of corporate revenge against a criminal. You've got this double motive: that it's intellectual – how do you find something that's a puzzle – and then moral.

Then, you have to catch the person. Because if you've committed a crime like that, you'd want to conceal yourself. That can be difficult, and there's the law. But the law is sometimes hindered by legality; the law has to behave legally. So you can often have to resort to what is called a "private eye" – which is a beautiful expression, "private eye." In other words, the private eye is stronger and sees better than the public eye because the public eye is limited in a way. The private detective becomes sometimes an aid to the police. Or the police can themselves behave somewhat illegally in order to do what their legal duty requires.

This is the special theme of writer [Bill James](#), who has – I guess he's still alive; David Craig is, I think, his real name. He has 50, 60 books written, and he has this wonderful pair: Superintendent Harper and Assistant Chief Constable Desmond Isles, who's a wonderful rascal of a fellow. The two of them find continually that in order to enforce the law, they have to disobey the law.

KRISTOL: This is in Britain?

MANSFIELD: This is in Britain, yes. That's the "Chief Constable" part.

KRISTOL: Yes, right. We don't have those here in the U.S., I don't think.

MANSFIELD: No, we don't. So this is in Britain, yes. So that is Harper and Isles, and there is a whole series on them from Bill James.

The complication to this is that the criminals, for their part, have a strong desire in the other direction – that if you're a successful criminal, you want to become respectable. So what's not respectable wants to be respectable, and what is respectable in order to enforce respectability has to be unrespectable. That's the problem in the Bill James series.

But I could also mention two others. One is really "The Queen of Mystery," and that's [Agatha Christie](#), whom one can overlook. Not such a wonderful writer, but a wonderful psychologist and plotter. She knows how to fool the reader. So she gives clues, but sometimes these are false or misleading clues.

To read her you're taken up one alley after another – each of them turns out to be blind and then, finally, you get the result. And the result shows the difference between appearance and reality, and, yet, the appearance should have told you more about the reality. So she makes it so that you see now that you misinterpreted, or gave an innocent interpretation to something that was really quite revealing and guilty.

As I said, you have not only to catch the criminal but you have to prove that he did it. And that means that there needs to be something resembling a confession at the end, some guilty move – if not a total verbal confession from the criminal that makes it clear who he was and will enable society to bring its power of enforcement into play.

She had two detectives, one man and one woman. This is the wonderful thing about Agatha Christie. She's sort of above the sexual difference and is able to see the fun, and the fables, and the virtues of either sex. So she has Hercule Poirot, who is a very manly, boastful manly-man who's very intelligent and extremely proud of his gray cells; you can't fool Hercule Poirot. And so he – but she also gives him little features of boastly manliness that enliven his character. To do this, she sometimes introduces

herself into the Hercule Poirot mysteries as a lady novelist who is always making interesting suggestions that turn out to be inadequate to Poirot, and he has to gently turn her down. So she plays this lady novelist, Ariadne Oliver, who has messy hair and sort of irregular habits. She runs up to him and says, "Oh Poirot, I think this is crime of passion!" And he looks at her and says, "Madam, which passion? There are so many passions." So this male superiority over women.

But then she has her woman detective, who's Miss Marple, Jane Marple – who's an "old pussy," she calls her – who lives in a small town and understands everything that goes on in that town, but understands other things, too, by analogy. She's always thinking of someone she knows who's like the person that she's encountered in this crime. That's a reasoning by analogy: knowing someone, place, and set of people extremely well and being able to deduce from them what they do.

So that's Agatha Christie.

KRISTOL: Tell me about – she stresses so much in the Miss Marple novels the reasoning by analogy. I suppose that's by contrast with deduction, or sort of scientific logic. Is that her, sort of, other way to understand the world?

MANSFIELD: That's right. It's a woman's way, that's the idea, as opposed to Poirot's more deductive way. They're both alright, they both succeed. She never uses them together, I don't think.

KRISTOL: What strikes me about Christie which – I was rereading, and they're so easy to read, of course, you just pick them up and they go so quickly, and you don't see the skill or the art. But she has a reputation because she's from the "golden age of British mysteries" and all that of being these puzzles, intricate puzzles, which is not really true. I would say, if anything, the plotting and sometimes the puzzles are a little far-fetched, and she isn't taken serious in that way. But she's much more a psychologist, I think, than people give her credit for.

MANSFIELD: No, her psychology is wonderful. She's not a modern psychologist – she's against murder, she's in favor of justice.

KRISTOL: She stresses that.

MANSFIELD: Yes, stresses that. And both of these are highly intellectual people, both of these detectives, Poirot and Miss Marple. They also are motivated by a strong desire to punish the evil that they find. So there is such a thing as evil. I think that's very important to her.

KRISTOL: Do you prefer the Poirot or the Marple ones? Usually people, people often take sides in this, you know.

MANSFIELD: I suppose the Poirot, but I like them both and the author. Her psychology is commonsensical and yet not simpleminded, but quite complicated. People are evil in different ways, and they have different ways of hiding it. I think that's a great theme with her, and with the mystery in general, that things aren't what they seem.

KRISTOL: But you can somehow get to what things are by thinking through what they – by being more attentive to what they seem somehow.

MANSFIELD: That's right, there is a way to resolve that. And then there's [Donald Westlake](#), the great Donald Westlake, who invented the comic mystery. Now, he looks at things from the viewpoint of the criminal, as opposed to – from the point of view of the police or the detective.

So he's always trying to create a crime and get away with it, and difficult things happen. I especially like the Parker series – he has a series of a criminal whom he just calls "Parker," that's both his first and last name. Parker's a very efficient criminal. He is guided by necessity rather than by honor, although honor comes in.

That you could say is the general problem in Westlake, that in order to commit a crime, you need more than yourself – unless it's just a murder – you need a gang. In order to get a gang, there's a certain division of labor – you need to gather together a driver, and someone who is going to blow the safe – the different jobs, and you have to coordinate them. And the trouble is if you're a criminal, you have a criminal mind and you're likely to be a crook. That means that you might easily betray the person that you're working with, although there is a kind of "enforceable justice" among criminals that Plato talks about in the first book of the *Republic*, "there is a justice among criminals." Any group requires some minimal justice to get along together, to cohere. And this just comes from the fact that they are all getting shares of the loot. And yet, each of them has an incentive, and is not inhibited from it by a sense of justice, or even of honor. They'll try to betray you and take your share and end up with everything, if they can.

Then there is also the difficulty of the police. This is especially true in the Parker novels. He hardly ever – this he does under the pseudonym of "Richard Stark." Richard Stark, he hardly ever talks about the police, but they have a huge presence because they're always there, and they make criminals act in a certain way. A criminal will be offered an easy sentence, or even get off, if he'll betray his friends or the other members of the gang. And so the members of the gang are always conscious of this and they have to look out for it. They have a motive whenever they do something that might get to the attention of the police to kill, to wipe out the person who might be in the way. So that's the kind of general view from the standpoint of the criminal that you get in the Westlake novels.

Then he has a more well-known series with Dortmunder, who's the head of the gang. Those are the really funny ones, and, in general, people don't get killed in those. Those are capers. And you get the thrill of transgression. I should mention that there's a thrill in breaking the law, which is very human as well, almost as human as the desire to punish people who break the law. The two of those are always at odds in novels of crime.

KRISTOL: It's amazing that Westlake – he didn't quite invent the noir sort of story told from the point of the view of the criminal, which is really what the Parker series is, sympathetic to Parker, really.

He's the hero, or the anti-hero, of the series. Others were doing that when Westlake started to write it too, but he probably wrote one of the best series of that kind. He also writes, I think, clearly the best, the greatest comic capers with Dortmunder, so he can do both the dark and comic, which is impressive.

MANSFIELD: You can say one general lesson of Westlake is that crime doesn't pay. They don't get all that much money and sometimes they don't get any, and they have a lot of trouble divvying it up, and once you've got it, you can't spend it because that would attract the attention of police. So you have all this money stashed away in different places in cash. It's not earning for you. It's really not; it's not the way to go. But it's fun. It makes crime fun.

KRISTOL: He really seems to understand – especially in the comic novels with Dortmunder – the impulse to break society's conventions. He's quite sympathetic to that, I would say, and to steal from underserving rich people for this nice group of criminals who don't harm anyone and are pleasant people.

MANSFIELD: Some of them good family lives.

KRISTOL: I suppose he'd be the opposite of Agatha Christie on the surface, but maybe not so much, I don't know. She seems less sympathetic to the impulse to break the law. Maybe murder is different from –

MANSFIELD: That's right, murder is serious.

KRISTOL: Any other – well, those are three excellent places to start since they've all wrote a huge amount – Christie, Westlake, and James, one could spend a long time reading those three. Do you have a general view on the big controversy among mystery fans, the British versus the American? Raymond

Chandler wrote that famous essay, "[The Simple Art of Murder](#)," which sort of sets up the contrast between the excessively fussy British puzzles and the hardboiled American.

MANSFIELD: No, I like them both. I don't object, either to the fussiness or grossness. The hardboiled character of the American. Yes, it is a nice contrast to the two peoples, you could say – two ways of evil.

KRISTOL: Two ways of solving it.

MANSFIELD: Or treating it.

KRISTOL: Is it the two peoples, or is it more aristocratic society versus modern democracy?

MANSFIELD: There is certainly something aristocratic. Lord Peter Wimsey, Dorothy Sayers' famous detective. Sherlock Holmes is certainly an aristocratic character. Whereas Americans – Chandler, Humphrey Bogart, one thinks of. That is more democratic – also more straightforward, more vicious and violent. So that's crime.

KRISTOL: So that's good.

## **II: P. G. Wodehouse (22:20 – 33:18)**

MANSFIELD: Oh, and another wonderful writer, and a master of English prose is [P. G. Wodehouse](#), who wrote comic novels all his life. Many, many of them. Maybe 100, maybe a few more than 100. He wrote about 300 words a day, which is not a lot – a page or two – but he did it every day for 90 years, or however long he lived. It was a long time.

He's a wonderful plot maker. You enter a different world. There turns out to be a little bit of crime, but this is the world of morality. Whereas everything is done by, not only morally, but with a code – the gentlemen's code.

P. G. Wodehouse has a number of characters, but best known are the two, the pair of Bertie Wooster, who's the gentleman who doesn't do very much, a man of leisure. He belongs to a club that reminds you of a college fraternity called "The Drones Club" – a drone is, you know, a kind of bee that doesn't do any work. That's the case with Bertie Wooster. Then, he has this valet, Jeeves, who just has a single name like Parker. And Jeeves is much smarter than Bertie. Bertie, you can see, represents moral virtue, and Jeeves represents intellectual virtue. Whereas, with the books on crime, you get a confrontation between morality and immorality, or between good and evil; here, you get a confrontation between two kinds of good: the moral good and the intellectual good. You could say Wodehouse is on a different level, in this way, than the crime writers. It's a little bit deeper, even though the crime writers have this difference between the smart people, the private eye and the police, the legal people. Here you have the moral person who gets into all kinds of difficulties because he's not over-intelligent.

Poor Bertie, that's just his fate. He knows it. So he reveres Jeeves who always saves him from his escapades when he gets into trouble. It turns out that it isn't just a question of moral good versus evil, moral good versus evil, as within morality – that even if you're trying to be good in every respect, you still run into difficulty.

Almost all the characters in Wodehouse novels are trying to be good, or trying to be gentlemen and ladies. Now, if you bring up ladies, that's perhaps the difficult point of being good. A gentleman must always take the word of a lady, must never challenge a lady.

If she presents a difficulty to you – suppose some girl, Madeline Bassett, say, falls in love with Bertie, this is a total unsuitable match for him and he knows it, but he can't just say, "I don't love you, go away." No, you can't say "no" to a woman, never. You have to find some way of changing her mind: either by attracting her attention to somebody else, or something else, or by making yourself disgusting to her in some way that's convincing so that she'll voluntarily drop her inconvenient interest in you.

This kind of difficulty is what requires the attention of Jeeves, the intellect. He comes up with these wonderful solutions, but the solutions have a general default, or a fault. And that is that they're too complicated. They often depend on Bertie being as smart as Jeeves, or as reliable. And he isn't.

And he can't. So he often turns out to be the chump at the end of the tale. And Jeeves will get him out of his problems by making him the fall guy. So that he is and isn't on Bertie's side. His intellectuality isn't as effective as it might be if it were able to be placed in the mind of Bertie.

There's this wonderful sort of distinction between the moral person and the intellectual person, and each of them has a defect that keeps it from fully understanding the other. And also, of course, the superiority of the intellect to the moral person.

Bertie shows us that he's a gentleman because he recognizes this. You might say the Wodehouse definition of a gentleman is somebody who recognizes that other people are smarter and takes advantage of this, but still is totally unembarrassed by it because Bertie is the master and Jeeves is the servant.

KRISTOL: So gentlemanliness is not enough, or needs the defense of this intellect?

MANSFIELD: Gentlemanliness is not enough, and knows it's not enough at the best level, the highest level of gentlemanliness.

KRISTOL: And the acceptance of the class structure, and of Jeeves working for Bertie, that, I think, rubs Americans the wrong way. Why isn't Jeeves just, you know, shouldn't it be a meritocratic society and Jeeves be in charge? What's the answer to that?

MANSFIELD: Well, tradition. Family. Aristocracy needs some kind of conventional definition. And if you try to turn aristocracy into meritocracy, then you uncover a kind of person who isn't reliable. Or who will be zealous in the wrong way. There is a character in Jeeves called "The Efficient Baxter." "The Efficient Baxter" – he's a secretary to one of the Earls, and he's always doing the efficient thing. He's intellectual, but quite unlike Jeeves because he's merely instrumental and doesn't – So the gentleman has a notion somehow of the whole, and how to govern it. It's very like Burke, you know.

Edmund Burke, in the 18th century, was an Irishman who came into English politics and worked under a Lord, Lord Rockingham, who was much less intelligent than he. Burke – these are the Rockingham Whigs in the 1770s in English Parliament – and Burke deserved to be their head. He was head and shoulders above most outstanding men of his time, and yet he always deferred to them because he made a distinction between "actual virtue" and "presumptive virtue." Actual virtue is just raw merit. And that's too raw to govern. People don't like to obey you just because you're smarter and superior because of that.

So people will take it if you're smarter and you defer to them, like Jeeves. And that's what presumptive virtue – presumptive virtue is the virtue that you can presume from an old family or from some kind of traditional association or grouping. I think this works out in the Wodehouse novels, too. They're very funny, by the way.

KRISTOL: I suppose in a modern, meritocratic democracy, such as we fancy ourselves living in, the intellectual type like Jeeves, or the politically superior type like Burke would also have to subordinate themselves, or pretend to subordinate themselves to the people, I suppose, to the aristocrats. It's not as if we – we might think we're meritocratic, but Wodehouse would probably say it's not that different really, or it's a different kind of, or inferior kind of subordination.

MANSFIELD: Actually, Wodehouse does have some American characters. He spent some time in America and actually wrote in Hollywood. He puts Americans in his – they're often gang members or gangsters of some kind. They're always, however, comic gangsters, sort of like the Westlake ones. They



don't actually commit crimes, but they just have rough manners, which – “rough manners but warm hearts” is his way of presenting America to Britain.

### III: James Q. Wilson (33:18 – 43:52)

KRISTOL: It would be great to read, in my opinion, Westlake and Christie and Wodehouse all the time – in addition to the great books, of course – but, as a political scientist, I guess you occasionally read some political science or social science? Give us a recommendation or two in that area.

MANSFIELD: Yes, I am a political scientist, sometimes I forget and others might forget, too. But I am. My favorite political scientist of recent vintage is [James Q. Wilson](#), the late James Q. Wilson – a great friend of mine, a very close friend. He had this lovely “Q” in the middle of his name. I used to think that everybody's name is improved by having a “Q” in the middle. James Wilson, of course, that's one of the Founding Fathers, so he's James Q. Wilson.

He was a wonderful political scientist who was interested especially in bureaucracy and in the police. He wrote a book called *Bureaucracy*, and another book called *Varieties of Police Behavior*, which is absolutely a gorgeous title, I think, succinct. There is another book written by a friend of his, Nelson Polsby, called [Consequences of Party Reform](#), which is also a beautiful title.

The two of those, I think, vie for the best title of a political science book in the last half-century or so. Wilson did his political science, or social science, in a different way from most. Most political scientists consider themselves to be social scientists – nothing special about the political. Wilson didn't think so.

Most social scientists base their science on the individual, beginning from the individual. There's two ways of doing that. One is like an economist – to look at the individual as a rational actor who calculates every move. You can draw up your theory based on the rational actor, which is either a description of the way people actually are, or it's a recommendation of the way they ought to be, if they're calculating correctly.

But then the economists are opposed by the psychologists. The psychologists say there isn't any such thing as a rational actor, there's no reason whatsoever, everybody's irrational. The way to be happy is a famous example of the colleague of mine, Daniel Gilbert – he's a psychologist, Harvard psychologist – wrote a book called *Stumbling into Happiness*. And so the way to be happy is to stumble and to take what comes to you.

But Wilson looked at the patterns in society. An individual is a member of, or a factor in a pattern. He doesn't write a book on police behavior, he writes on varieties on police behavior. A pattern makes you aware that there are different patterns, and so you proceed by comparing one pattern to another. You compare military bureaucracy with a private, say McDonald's, or with a public bureaucracy, like the Registry of Motor Vehicles.

He starts his book on bureaucracy by contrasting what happens when you visit the Registry of Motor Vehicles versus when you buy a hamburger from McDonald's. And then the military bureaucracy is interesting, too, because those are different depending on the branch. The Army has a very hierarchical command structure, whereas the Navy also has a very hierarchical, but it's divided into little units because the captain of each ship has total control over that ship. Whereas the Air Force, that's much more democratic and individual because each pilot has control over his plane, and so that gives the bureaucracy a different look.

When you look at bureaucracy, you must try to not just to, say, denounce all types of bureaucracy as such, but try to understand in each case what is the purpose? What is the bureaucratic mission? How do they understand what their job is? And, also, what is the typical activity?

In the Social Security Administration, the typical activity is an agent who talks to a customer or somebody who's seeking benefits or has some problem. Whereas in the police, the typical activity is a policeman

who faces – when he's called it's because there's some disorder, which is either occurring or has occurred – something is wrong. So he goes, and he arrives, and he has to bring order into this disorder. That's a very difficult thing. All the responsibility is on that arriving individual. What a policeman mainly wants from the higher-ups is to be backed up. He took a decision that was quick, and yes, he has the rules, but here it is somebody is breaking the rules, so how does he handle it?

All these organizations have a different, different patterns, which can be analyzed in different ways. And these patterns are all political. The patterns are patterns of authority and how authority is distributed, whether it's concentrated or made dispersed. This was his political science, and I really admired him for it.

KRISTOL: On the political point, I suppose one could say both the economists and the psychologists – speaking of the individual, the economist, the rational actor; the psychologist, whatever, whatever's in the psyche based on your childhood or however else they understand that.

But I guess the sociologist came along, and they were big when I was younger but not so much anymore, and did have the insight that society matters, that you're not an autonomous individual, either economically or psychologically – but Wilson's work is more political. How would you distinguish Wilson as a political scientist from intelligent sociologists who also saw the patterns of different –

MANSFIELD: They're not always that distinct. There's a discipline of political sociology, which had a Seymour Martin Lipset, people of that caliber. It takes a strong intellect, I think, to combine them both. The political emphasizes hierarchy, I think, whereas sociology is, for the most part, a very democratic subject.

KRISTOL: More bottom-up, right? This organization just grows up this way.

MANSFIELD: People are social by being sociable and sort of needing each other. Whereas I think Wilson saw it more politically – that there was always some authority or hierarchy.

Someway – Aristotle used this word *rule*, that a rule is not just something that you formulate, but it's something that actually guides your action. A rule and ruling go together, and every social situation that you see has some form of ruling in it. Even democracy is not a no-rule society, but it's a rule of the – actually there is a top, of the majority; there is public opinion.

KRISTOL: And also a purpose, right, and also a goal politically, as opposed to just, being a sociable group.

MANSFIELD: Being together for the heck of it.

KRISTOL: I think in one of your early writings, you distinguish political parties from parties. Sort of a different – Parties are just for the sake of having a nice party, presumably, and being sociable.

MANSFIELD: Yes. It's for the sake of relief from the serious business of political parties and other, other serious concerns.

KRISTOL: So James Q. Wilson, that's good. He certainly deserves this tribute, and people should read him – both those two books and also some of the occasional writings of his that are, other books and essays that are so perceptive about America and other places.

MANSFIELD: Yes, right. He wasn't just concerned with these two things, but I think that's sort to the heart of his work.

#### **IV: Winston Churchill as Writer (43:52 – 57:58)**

KRISTOL: And what else?



MANSFIELD: I want to go to Churchill, Winston Churchill. That's biography, and a particular form of biography that's autobiography. Churchill was a great writer as well as a great statesman.

You discover that, somewhat to your surprise, when you look at his writings, they have in general the character of memoirs, although he wrote them as history, mostly. He did write a biography of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, and a wonderful biography of his ancestor Lord Marlborough, who was the great English general against the forces of Louis XIV, when the Continent allied with the Dutch.

That's a very long book that Churchill wrote in the late 1930s when he was worried about the rise of Hitler. The rise of Hitler, but he also had time on the side, so to speak, to undertake a four-volume history that would certainly fully occupy any ordinary historian.

So this is mostly memoirs, and that's a good thing to look at, modern memoirs. For example, Henry Kissinger's memoirs are very good. Not on the level of Churchill, but that's not to be expected. Or Harold Macmillan's memoirs are also extremely good. What statesmen say reflecting on themselves.

Churchill had a rule that, when he was talking about himself, that he always wanted to make you aware of the forces that were in play at the time that he was acting. So, he's not so interested in retrospective vision, or hindsight – deciding this came out well or that didn't come out well – but whether he made a good choice in the circumstances, and how he made that.

And the book that I think I would focus on is the first book of his history of the Second World War, called [\*The Gathering Storm\*](#), which is about England and the Continental powers in the 1930s. It's about the rise of Hitler – that's "the gathering storm", also with Stalin figuring in, but concentrating on Hitler and the reaction of the Western democracies to Hitler, which was, in general, appeasement.

I remember two phrases I would quote from *The Gathering Storm*. One is when he's discussing, when Churchill is discussing the appeasement of Hitler in Munich, that famous visit of Chamberlain to Munich when he essentially surrendered to Hitler, "Let him bite off a bit of Czechoslovakia." And Churchill says, "Everybody respects the Quakers." The Quakers stand for peace, and what is pacific. That is true, or correct, insofar as peace is always superior to war. The reason you fight a war is to have peace. One shouldn't forget that. To that extent, the Quakers are right.

Where they are wrong is that peace is always a certain peace. Which means a particular peace with particular outcomes or circumstances. And especially a peace that comes with justice. So that peace must be satisfied with justice. They're protestors today who have these signs that say, "No justice, no peace." Those are peaceniks, you can say, who recognize the primacy of justice, or at least that – So everybody's for peace, but everybody's also for justice. It's in your interest to have peace, but it isn't always in your interest to have justice – especially in somebody else's concern.

Here I take a passage from Harold Macmillan's memoirs, the man I mentioned earlier. He was, of course, later an English Prime Minister, but at the time of Munich – this is a little later, this is in 1939 after the war has begun, and England has declared war on Germany in consequence of Germany's invasion of Poland, and Macmillan was an ambassador, English ambassador in Sweden. And the Swede told him, he said, "Why are you doing this? It's not in England's interest to go to war with Germany." And Macmillan remembers that he looked at this fellow and said, "But somebody has to stand up against Hitler."

So that was a matter of honor. Sometimes peace has to be rectified, has to be validated and vindicated through one's honor. You will do what you said you would do, and you're committed to the defense of Czechoslovakia or Poland, and you've got to carry through on that. So I think that's what's left out of the Quakers who otherwise deserve respect.

The other phrase from *The Gathering Storm* that I remember is "Facts are better than dreams."

KRISTOL: At the very end, I think that's the last sentence.

MANSFIELD: Yes, "Facts are better than dreams." What he was referring to was his having become Prime Minister of England, at long last. He'd been worrying and badgering the government, attacking it for appeasing Hitler and appeasing the Germans. Doing nothing.

And now, at last, the war had started, and it had not gone well. Chamberlain had to resign, and there was a wonderful meeting with Chamberlain and Lord Halifax and the King. Lord Halifax remarked that "he was in the House of Lords, he didn't think he could serve as Prime Minister," and Churchill realized that meant that "it had come to me."

The evening after, the night after that happened he slept well. "Facts are better than dreams." That's funny because facts are usually in the way of dreams. You dream about something, but in fact – "I wish I had a fancy car, but in fact, I can't afford it." Now that shows a certain kind of fact, and that is a person, a man who's confident and in charge of things instead of being dismayed or impressed, at least, with all the difficulties that faced him. After having complained about the government that exists, he was happy; he could sleep well now because he knew that he could handle this. And he did. And he conveyed this confidence to the British people. He had the ability to do that. That was part of his confidence, that he knew how to convey his confidence.

You see this all described by him. He wrote this after the war, later on, and now he's showing you how he felt and how he was able to be effective and to help the rest of us win that war.

KRISTOL: That last paragraph was fantastic because the Germans have just invaded the Low Countries and, I guess, France – or about to, or maybe just have France – and they're going to crush those, that resistance, of course, and Churchill sleeps very well because he's in charge.

MANSFIELD: This is just before Dunkirk.

KRISTOL: Which is just a few weeks later, I think.

MANSFIELD: The British Army had to – instead of surrender, to retreat back to England.

KRISTOL: "Facts are better than dreams" is such fantastic window into a certain kind of political view of things, I suppose, to a more philosophic, you might say, or theoretical view.

MANSFIELD: Yes, dreams of philosophy. That's good. "Facts are better than dreams."

KRISTOL: I do think Churchill's writings, contrary to so many modern historians, do try to put you in the moment so you see what the decision-maker sees. That's the worst thing, I think, about all the modern histories, are from Olympian heights or with hindsight.

MANSFIELD: Hegel talks about that. He talks about three kinds of history, and the first one is original history, which has this, where the standpoint of the historian is the same as the standpoint of the actor. The great forerunner of Churchill would be Caesar and talking about the Gallic Wars, *Commentaries on the Gallic Wars*. Caesar refers to himself in the third person, "Caesar."

KRISTOL: Hegel did a lot to discredit, or to move everyone beyond that kind of history – everything becomes "part of the age" and "forces."

MANSFIELD: It was also reflective history, which he didn't like. That was critical history based on critique of the historical records – in which the historian is, sort of, above events. But then the last kind is Hegel's kind, and that's philosophic history – the person who can understand how this fits into the grand process of human events; who tries to see further than perhaps one can really see.

KRISTOL: And maybe doesn't do justice to the people in the middle –

MANSFIELD: Yes. Right. He thinks that they're dominated by passion, whereas they're perhaps not as stupid as that implies.

KRISTOL: Churchill's speeches, I think, are good for that reason, too. One could, of course, read other people's speeches from the time, too, but to see what he actually said, you know, in the middle of these different stages of the war, gives you a sense of both what he could see and what he couldn't, of course, anticipate; what he couldn't see. But it's more impressive, mostly, what he could. You could say, "Well, he writes *The Gathering Storm* after the war so he has the advantage of hindsight," even though he sort-of pretends not to take advantage of it, you might say. But the speeches he doesn't, and those are pretty amazing.

MANSFIELD: Yeah, those speeches, definitely, you have to read.

KRISTOL: You always liked biographies, and good biographies you think do a better job of – I mean, leaving aside autobiographies and memoirs – good biographies also can put one in the –

MANSFIELD: Yes, you should read more biography and less political science. That's because political science abstracts from individuals, as a rule. And individuals are extremely important, especially in politics.

KRISTOL: In a democratic age, the tendency's the other way.

MANSFIELD: A democratic age looks to vast, impersonal forces that are controlling, and make it seem as if single persons, or single events can't have an effect. Churchill had a great effect as an individual, and so, by the way, did Hitler. He really changed the whole course of European history, Hitler did. And we're lucky that we had a reaction to it in Churchill.

KRISTOL: Amazing, really, if you think about it, and sort of a figure from another era, actually. And even Roosevelt, I would say, that these two, somewhat aristocratic figures – and De Gaulle – three sort-of aristocratic figures save democracy. Maybe there's a lesson there. So Churchill, that was, I'm all for reading Churchill.

**V: *Gulliver's Travels* (57:58 – 1:18:23)**

KRISTOL: What else have you been reading?

MANSFIELD: I've been reading [\*Gulliver's Travels\*](#).

KRISTOL: That is sort of a great book.

MANSFIELD: Now we reach great books, yes.

KRISTOL: Yes, but let's talk about it anyway. Considered by some to be a children's book.

MANSFIELD: Swift had the faculty of appealing to both children and adults. You can appreciate this story about a man who's in one place a giant and in another place a dwarf. This is my friend Allan Bloom's way of looking at *Gulliver's Travels*, "giants and dwarves." And this is a comic novel. Swift must have been one of the funniest persons who ever lived. And you read *Gulliver's Travels*, you laugh out loud, it's not a chuckle; it's an explosion of laughter. His lovely touch, light touch, but very, very funny. It's, I think, a consideration, on the whole, of modern science, or modern philosophy of science.

It raises the question of sciences and the humanities today, which I think is the most important problem in our universities, and perhaps also in our society. The power of science. Everybody looks to it, everybody admires it; we all depend on it. Computers. Modern medicine.

So the power of modern science but also its limitation. It doesn't seem to describe humanity. In university, the sciences are sovereign. Generally speaking, what the scientists want from the university they can get, and what's left over goes to the humanities.

And in recent years, students have been going to sciences – especially computer science – as more commercial, more marketable. But also, maybe, more exact, more authoritative, more clear. That's knowledge. And the rest of us, the rest of what is available is mushy. It's unclear; it's disputable. It doesn't seem to make sense in a way that, or that produces good effects, in the way modern science does.

But on the other hand, modern science produces bad effects, like atom bombs. It empowers humanity, but also endangers us. For the first time in the history of man, we have the power to destroy man, to destroy ourselves. Not just global warming, but nuclear war. That's a stunner when you think about that.

Moreover, sciences don't have much to do with the good or with what's good for human beings. "Science seems to make monkeys of us," as Nietzsche said. It defines us as creatures of cause and effect rather than creatures of free will and choice, and rule and command. So it seems to make us unimportant. Science is about two things, two realms, you could say: The realm of the unbelievably large – as is astronomy – and the realm of the unbelievably small – and that's microbiology.

And we're stuck in the middle. We seem to follow rules, whereas we live in a world that we recognize and seems, at least, in some ways friendly to us – Sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening, and gives us warmth and brings us rain, and so on.

But science, with its instruments – the telescope and the microscope – is concerned with the non-human, and it has a tendency to understand the human in terms of the non-human. This is the power of science and yet, there's reason, perhaps, to assert the value of humans.

All humans believe that they have value. This goes in the way in which we use names, or individual names. Everybody has his own name and like other people to recognize that name, and if somebody else gets it wrong, you correct that person, and you want it spelled right, too.

Your name stands for your individual importance. So human importance seems to be a self-importance. It's an importance which we attribute to ourselves, or assert to ourselves. This is, I think, the general topic of *Gulliver's Travels*: how important are we? Gulliver goes to this Lilliput, where everybody is six inches tall and has a king who turns out to be an emperor, and Gulliver picks him up and holds him in his palm, and the king speaks of himself, or is spoken of, as "the delight and the terror of the universe," that's the phrase that is used.

Now that's perfectly ridiculous when you're six inches tall, like a little play soldier would suddenly start speaking and you're supposed to take that little thing seriously. So there seems to be a kind of proportion that's required. Gulliver first goes to a place where he's the giant, much bigger than the six-inch people, but then he goes to another place, Brobdingnag, where he's small as the Lilliputians were to him.

So you get a kind of proportion there: Lilliput is to Gulliver as Gulliver is to Brobdingnag. It brings out to you that nature consists in a kind of proportion.

Suppose that human reason was put, not in a human body, but in the body of an ant. It wouldn't work. There's not enough that you can do from that, from that seat. So there has to be – and also there has to be a relationship between trees and so on, and land and oceans. All this has to be just so. And scientists recognize this, that the parameters of life and human life require extremely special circumstances, very unlikely. That's one way in which Swift, Jonathan Swift, brings out the importance of nature, and how nature, therefore, does somehow sustain our sense of importance by giving us the proportionate relationship with the rest of things around us; never mind, so much, the microbiology and enormously large suns and stars and space that's above us.

Now then if you look at the difference between Lilliput and Brobdingnag, you see that Lilliput seems to represent moderns and Brobdingnag, ancients. This whole question of modern thinking and ancient thinking was a very live topic in Swift's time, the early 18th century, and the discovery of ancient texts and modern scholarship was just getting going. There was Richard Bentley, who was a classical scholar who knew all the classics and was a great scholar of Greek, was a great admirer of modern innovation. And Swift also wrote a short writing on the "battle of the books," which is the ancient books versus the modern books. This was very lively.

So the Lilliputians seemed to represent moderns – they want to use Gulliver. The first thing they see is this huge thing, this is a force that maybe we can use, so we have to capture him. This famous scene in which Gulliver wakes up and he's all tied down by these little people. They don't worship him. They don't recognize him as a God. In fact, they seem to be atheists.

In that phrase, "delight and terror of the universe," there is man and there is the universe; there are no Gods in there that are mentioned. He's not worshiped and he's not admired except for his power, and they immediately capture him and then try to use him against their enemies, the Blefuscudians. Then Gulliver – another famous scene in *Gulliver's Travels*, he captures the entire navy, or, at least the most powerful navy, of Lilliput's enemies and brings it by pulling from their harbor to Lilliput.

Brobdingnag seems to stand for the ancients and the primacy of moral virtue. There he is treated much better except that he's kept in a box for his safety, but it's also a kind of imprisonment. He can't escape as he did, partially, in Lilliput. But he can converse; he has conversations with the king in a way that he did not have with the king in Lilliput.

Their king is interested in Britain, so Swift here is able to give a very satirical description of what goes on in British politics in his time. Which turns out very much to the embarrassment and shame of the British, as opposed to these big-people in Brobdingnag.

Still, here you see man feeling smaller than the rest of nature, as opposed to man feeling larger, as he does in Lilliput. Modern science makes us extremely powerful, makes man – makes a kind of Gulliver, a man mountain. But at the same time, it doesn't admire what it makes because it's a product. A product is an effect, and if you look at the "effectual truth" – I'm using that Machiavellian expression – of a human being, it's what comes out of him. Swift, when you read all of his writings, and especially *Gulliver's Travels*, seems to have an obsession with human excrement. Or what he calls in one case, "offensive matter."

What comes out of you is still your own, but it's valueless. I think that's his picture, you might say, of the reductionism of modern science; it takes good things and uses it in such a way that what is left over is "still yours" and has a bad smell. This is a part of human nature that isn't treated very much otherwise, but Swift seems to take delight. And then there is the famous way in which he helped the queen of Lilliput by putting out a fire in the palace by using his male member to direct a stream that would – "in the proper places," as Swift points out – so as to put out the fire in the king's palace. That's perhaps one of the most famous episodes; something everybody remembers when you read *Gulliver's Travels*.

I have a notion that this stream of pee, let's call it, is, represents Swift's satire, or his irony, that he uses it to put out the fires that modernity has made for itself. Later on, in Books Three and Four of *Gulliver's Travels*, Book Three is called "A Voyage to Laputa," and that seems to be a place where modern science rules, both in theory and in practice. Then the fourth is "A Voyage with Houyhnhnms," and those are horses who are totally rational.

Somehow, they have none of the spiritedness that you automatically associate with horses because they don't get angry or jealous, and don't have human passions. The third voyage, or the third part, "Laputa," represents a kind of philosophical explanation, or gives you the basis for Lilliput – the nation that he starts first in – and the Houyhnhnms give the basis for the Brobdingnags. So, this is kind-of "moderns versus ancients" repeated in One and Two, and then again in Three and Four.

Of course, the ancients are considerably, in a way, very platonic, but also very not platonic. Whereas in Plato's *Republic* you get an association and kind-of alliance between passion or anger and reason, among the Houyhnhnms reason asserts itself without any passion whatever. So it doesn't really assert itself. The Houyhnhnms are incapable of lying.

For them, they don't even have a word for it – it just says, “to say the thing that is not.” The Houyhnhnms wouldn't understand, or wouldn't be capable of appreciating Swift, who's ironic and satiric, makes fun of things. The Houyhnhnms are contrasted to the Yahoos. Those are nasty donkeys, which Gulliver compares to human beings. So, he comes back to England very ashamed of being a human being.

It's about shame, which is about human importance. If you're important, if you feel a sense of importance in yourself, then you can be – if you respect yourself, in other words, you can also be ashamed of yourself. That's what's left out in modern science, which is about matter.

Modern science doesn't understand offensive matter: your own matter, which is become offensive to you.

KRISTOL: I suppose that brings us back to Agatha Christie, for whom, also, the importance of justice is related, I think, to maybe a not simply allowing – not simply reductionist, scientific understanding of humans. This desire –

KRISTOL: A lot of her villains are scientists.

MANSFIELD: Opinions of people, the opinions that people hold of themselves. There's truth in that. The general truth of it is that we're somehow important.

KRISTOL: Some of Christie's – aren't a disproportionate about murderers doctors, I think, or scientists? I think she's slightly hostile to the modern, materialist, scientific view as not valuing the human. It ends up justifying greed or self-interest under this scientific – using the scientific method not to help people but to hurt them.

MANSFIELD: Science is above; it's too far above. It's way above “the gathering storm” and the epic battle between Hitler and Churchill.

KRISTOL: Right, right. Well, thank you for these excellent suggestions, which will certainly keep people busy for a long time. We'll do another conversation, and get more suggestions of further reading.

MANSFIELD: Yes, there might be some more.

KRISTOL: Good, excellent, something to look forward to. Harvey, thank you very much, and thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]