

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Harvey Mansfield, professor, Harvard University

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**I: (0:15 – 26:54 ) On Donald Trump**

KRISTOL: Hi I'm Bill Kristol, welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm joined again by Harvey Mansfield of Harvard University. This is three weeks after Donald Trump was elected; you're going to explain the meaning of Trump from the point of view of political science, political philosophy. Is Trump an altogether new phenomenon, or he is intelligible in terms of classical political science?

MANSFIELD: Well, let's see. He's certainly a challenge to political science. But let's start with Trump as demagogue.

KRISTOL: A traditional term.

MANSFIELD: A traditional term of Plato and Aristotle, a classical term, "demagogue." It's also used by the American Founders as something to be avoided in a popular government. Demagogue in Greek means, "an actor for the people." *Demos* is the beginning, "people." A "people actor". It's unclear whether the actor is the instrument of the people, or the people are the instrument of the actor. I think that's a characteristic unclarity of a demagogue.

But the classical writers seem to come down, at the end, to say that he's an instrument of the people. So, demagogues, demagoguery is characteristic of the people, so to speak – their fault, they are to blame for the people they are using to gain their ends.

Now, a demagogue also has this characteristic which Trump has, for sure, in that he loves to be loved, and he doesn't worry about the *quality* of the people who love him. He's only worried about the *quantity*. He wants a lot of people to love him, so to speak, without discrimination. That bears a close resemblance to what we call a "celebrity" in our democratic society now.

A celebrity, I would say, is right next door to a demagogue. Trump *qua* celebrity had a good preparation in life for becoming in politics a demagogue. [He is ] not so worried about the quality as the quantity. That would imply that he has a kind of preference for what is directly popular and not so much for what some thinker or maker of doctrine works out. So a demagogue doesn't have an "-ism." He is just himself and he wants to promote himself. Or is it the people? Or is it both?

And so you can see three things that Trump does in politics, two of which are new. First is that he loves big rallies – that's typical, traditional with a demagogue. Big rallies in which he gets to stand there and hold the attention of everyone, and everyone's looking at him, and listening only to him, and they get it directly from him. Without the media. That's his great point; he wants a direct appeal to you.

But, nowadays we have media. So to get around the media, Trump has invented this new technique, which I think is original with him for a politician, which is the tweet. Just a few words, but they always have a punch in them. He can attract attention that way, and the media are in the position of having to talk about him instead of he having to talk through them.

It's really an advantage, a considerable advantage to be able to sidestep, get around, run an end-run around the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, even the *Wall Street Journal*. They're all listening to him.

Then the third thing that he does is be outrageous. And in a way that no one has never seen, I think, in an American politician, and certainly not in a presidential candidate. For example, referring to a woman's menstrual condition is really forbidden territory, one would think. But he goes into forbidden territory, issues insults: "Crooked Hillary," "Lying Ted."

KRISTOL: Epithets.

MANSFIELD: Epithets, yes. Therefore, he gives people the impression that he, as they say, "he tells it like it is." Meaning he goes beyond the barriers, or the boundaries of good taste and of good manners, of politeness, of gentlemanliness.

But especially beyond the boundaries of political correctness, which are boundaries of our time, characteristic of our time. That makes people think that on this other side, beyond, he's found something secret, or the hidden cause of things, and he brings that out in the people.

He appeals to what is hidden in our thoughts. Really, our feelings, and gives it formulation; brings it out, makes it public. He doesn't exactly cause it in us, because it's there already, but you might say a "precipitating cause." It's a cause that makes the hidden cause – our dislike, our resentment, say, at political correctness – and brings it out.

Political correctness causes a lot of resentment. It's just – the most, maybe, characteristic expression of it is euphemism. So today we get a lot of talk about "undocumented immigrants." That's a euphemism. Why don't they have documents? It's because they're here illegally. They should be called "illegal immigrants," that's what they are. That's the non-politically correct expression for them. I noticed that even the *Wall Street Journal* is now talking about undocumented; and, of course, all the universities are up in arms about great dangers to the undocumented.

So that's an example. And Trump is appealing to those who are excluded from the benefits of political correctness, for whom there is no euphemism. But, in fact, they can be called "deplorables" and you can get away with it. These people look on those who are on 'the list', say, the protected list – so Blacks and other minorities, Asians, immigrants, Islamic gentlemen – and they see that they aren't on that list, and their interests are therefore not being preferred as those others are.

So that's, I think, the three elements of demagoguery that you find in Trump.

But then, we characteristically call him, or his ideas, by an -ism. So today in American politics you can hear the word "demagogic" to refer to particular events or actions, but "demagogue" as a whole, to describe someone, is quite rare; instead we use the word "populist," implying "populism." So that's this tendency to rationalize the irrational and to make it respectable, bring it out.

People will talk in terms, I think, more of ideas about Trump than is the case. To the extent he's a demagogue, he doesn't care about ideas; he cares about being loved, no matter by whom. But, maybe, he does have these characteristic ideas because he's looking at a particular audience, a particular section of the demos that is going to prefer him.

He also appeals to others who want to use him. That's another way in which, you know, people are not so enthusiastic for Trump's ideas as they are for his ability, and wish to change. To change. This is a kind of reckless word, "change." It doesn't say whether it's change for the better or not, or what kind of change, just change. As if we were desperate. As if our society was in desperate straits and we were reaching for any hope of safety.

That's this demagoguery and populism that he has: Immigration, free trade, pulling back from nation building, from neo-conservatism, martial adventurism – things like that that he's associated with. But, perhaps one should be careful of defining him by those ideas. He won't stick to them – this gives hope, maybe, that he won't stick to them, because if he is strongly opposed or if he sees that it isn't popular, he'll do something different.

On the other hand, he has this great confidence, having won against the odds, against everybody's opinion, every respectable opinion – well, let's say not quite everybody, most everybody's respectable opinion – he has a greater confidence in his own view than of others'. So we don't know exactly that we're facing.

KRISTOL: Let's go back to the demagogue question for a minute. Maybe you could distinguish that from the more traditional American, you know, common touch, log cabin. I'm struck that Trump did invent sort of, for the modern era, this notion of running his entire campaign as rallies. Traditionally, in the last week or two you have big rallies in the general election or something like that. But the way you showed – let's say Bill Clinton, or most candidates – showed empathy with the common man was to go to a diner and have a photo op where they pretend to have a conversation over coffee. Hillary Clinton did this with regular people, "ordinary Americans," as Hillary Clinton said at one point. But that's different somehow, I think, isn't it? Maybe you could distinguish sort of, let's say, 'normal democracy' from –

MANSFIELD: The normal politician would say, "Oh, you need informality." Informality is the way to get to the people. And they're right about that. But you can use this 'lecture' – is what Trump is essentially doing at these rallies – like a professor. You can use that in a very informal way.

KRISTOL: And he does speak informally, of course.

MANSFIELD: Very informally, with a lot of personality, and in his case, insults instead of jokes.

KRISTOL: He doesn't have a natural sense of humor.

MANSFIELD: No, he doesn't have a sense of humor of any kind.

KRISTOL: Demagogues don't, I guess.

MANSFIELD: Yes, I think that's right; they don't appeal to the popular love of humor – like Abe Lincoln, who always had a joke, had a funny story, relaxing a little bit. No, he wants to keep you tense.

KRISTOL: So humor implies some distance, maybe, right?

MANSFIELD: It does. You're backing off, you're able to laugh, i.e., laugh at *yourself*. A demagogue? No, he's serious. You've got to be.

KRISTOL: I was struck at the Republican Convention, and this is when I thought he could win; I didn't think he would win, as most people didn't, but I always thought he had a chance. When he said, I think it was something like this, "Hillary Clinton says, her slogan is 'I'm with Her,'" and he sort of ridiculed that and said, "My slogan is," or "I'm standing here to say, 'I'm with You.'" Which is a nice formulation, I think, of either a democratic leader or a demagogue, depending how you think of it.

But, in a way, Hillary Clinton was too old-fashioned, perhaps. Or the identity politics. I guess his appeal to the public, as a whole, trumped her kind of identity politics.

MANSFIELD: Her identity politics comes out of, you might say, the 'twilight of progressivism.' The Democratic Party stands for progress. But coming out of the Progressive Party in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it's been a long time since they've really believed in progress.

Progress means you can rationally say that some situation, some state of things is better than another. For example, it's better to be more equal than not. That's what they believe, but they don't think there is any reason they can give, as they are caught up in relativism and in the fact/value distinction and the inability of science to say what is good and what is bad.

So, they have redefined progress, simply, in this word 'change.' Makes it much vaguer; it takes the edge off it. Doesn't really promise anything except as if you were to pick up America like a doll and give it a shake – that's 'change.'

And, so, they've come to identify bringing more equality as protecting the most vulnerable sections of American society. And that comes back to their list of the politically correct minorities. They forget about the majority as a common good. Where is the common good? It isn't there. The common good consists of an addition of the good of, or the interests of various ethnic groups. So, that is really striking.

Even books that are written about "the emerging Democratic majority," they're just adding up minorities in order to make a majority. That seems totally inadequate. Where's America in that? And, especially, where is America's pride? Or, to think of Trump, where is America's greatness?

And America's greatness, of course, gets lost, lost in relativism. America thinks it's great, so does every other country; therefore, we're all equal. Therefore, actually, the countries that think they're great are morally inferior to those who are satisfied with being Denmark. So, that leads to a very weak, appeasing foreign policy. A foreign policy of apology, as we saw very clearly in Obama.

So, the status quo. The status quo, then, turns out to be the people who believe in, or talk about change – even though they don't believe in it. Or you could say that progressives are people who have stopped believing in progress, today.

KRISTOL: Our friend Jim Ceaser wrote a piece for *The Weekly Standard*, he was very struck by Bill Clinton, this was the late 90s, his use of "I feel your pain" as his attempt to identify with the public, obviously, in this sort of populist way, you might say, maybe a little demagogic way. I think he traced that back to Germany and thought nothing good would come of this kind of politics. But, I guess, it is striking. So, the liberal view is "I feel your pain," and Trump doesn't quite put it that way. I mean, he does talk about how things are bad and things have never been worse, "It's the worst trade treaty ever."

MANSFIELD: But he denounces it. He denounces it morally. "This is very bad, this is terrible. It doesn't have to be."

KRISTOL: So, it's less empathy and more rebellion.

MANSFIELD: Justice, or sense of rebellion. Resentment. Nietzsche wouldn't like Trump. Nietzsche, the philosopher, opposed to resentment.

KRISTOL: He wouldn't like "I feel your pain," either.

MANSFIELD: There's a lot of things he doesn't like, while we're talking about Nietzsche.

KRISTOL: What about the Founders, though? They might be upset by a politics that's a competition of "I feel your pain" or "I express your resentments?"

MANSFIELD: Right. I think they would prefer a politics of contentiousness, yes. But a politics where people propose for the common good, or for the public good. In America one finds a kind of mix, or a combination of two opposite things. A can-do spirit – things *can* be done. There are barriers in the way, but keep trying; we'll find a solution and then we'll do something, we'll get good results.

But then, also, there is a love of process. I've got my rights; you've got to respect them. You mustn't let your can-do spirit get in the way of my rights. If I'm a small house owner in the way of huge building that wants to get built, none of your can-do for me, I'm going to fight for my rights.

Somehow it's been – The people who stand behind the can-do spirit, I think, the common people who want to get things done, who live in a democracy and they suffer from democratic impatience. They don't like long-lasting wars, for example. Nothing long-lasting. Everything must be found and found quick. Freedom now. That's democratic impatience.

And most of the desire for process comes from the elites. It's the elites that protect our rights or define our rights. The elites consist mostly of lawyers. They stand up for things, which means they stand in the way of things.

Our Constitution is a kind of combination of the two: It has a lot of rights in it, but it also has powers in it. And this was meant to be a republican constitution that, for the first time, would work. That's what was promised to us in 1787. All previous republican constitutions have been lists of wishes. *If only* the people could have this and that; and *if only* this would happen and other things wouldn't get in the way.

Now, for the first time, a republic was going to be made capable and effectual, with a strong executive and not just a list of rights but a separation of powers. A separation of powers which would have checks and balances; but, also, in the contention between the powers, something good or better would emerge.

Having a constitution slows things down, slows down the hurried impatience of a republic or of a democratic people. It makes you think twice. A bicameral legislature – you can't pass a law just through one house, you have to also get the Senate, as well, and the signature of the president. All of this is supposed to add up to something more than merely preventing government from doing bad things, but also enabling it to do good things. Give it more energy and give it more stability, those two opposite characters that are promised in *The Federalist* for our Constitution.

You could say that the Constitution was set up against demagoguery, against the demagogues. The main danger identified by Madison in *Federalist 10* is a faction of a majority, not just of a minority, which most republics have been aimed to prevent, but a majority. Because a majority faction – that is, something that acts against the rights of others or against the common good – looks like a legitimate, republican majority. It's a *seeming* majority; majority for faction rather than for good.

This majority faction comes to be seen as the main danger, and the majority faction is mostly demagogues – people or leaders who are able to bamboozle the people. Mislead them, take them from where they ought to go, but perhaps, where they might like to go. *The Federalist* rather minimizes the contribution of the people, or the blame that the people deserve for their resentments, as opposed to their finer feelings.

KRISTOL: Right. And Hamilton, I think in *Federalist 1*, says, "In this and other circumstances, there will be these demagogues that try to arouse the public passion," and so forth. But I suppose there is, in a way, a somewhat thin line between these demagogues inciting the public and "standing with them," as Trump says, and energy in the executive. Right? Trump does appeal to something, or fizzes that over, perhaps.

MANSFIELD: Yes, that's right. So, our Founders also appeal to that. A kind of Machiavellian love of what is sensational – what makes a splash; what catches attention. That's what Trump gets by being outrageous. And that's what Hamilton tries to, you could say, 'tame' by giving Constitutional expression to it. Enabling a person with ambition to be an outstanding person and contribute to the common good, instead of being dismissed or even exiled because, because as one person with his own ambition, he's a danger to the republic.

So these ambitious, dangerous individuals are turned to good account in the Constitution; but they're checked, partly by the other powers – Congress and the Judiciary – but also, partly by the other ambitious people. Ambition is something that permeates our politics, I think. American politics is mainly defined as the "politics of contentious ambition," I would say. In front of the people and for the approval of the people.

KRISTOL: Somehow Trump wasn't checked, though. Either the Republican candidates or –

MANSFIELD: They tried, they did their best. There were too many of them.

KRISTOL: Maybe they weren't ambitious enough? I hadn't really thought about this before. I had that instinct during the campaign, that they were too – everyone said that they seemed too, too conventional, vanilla, orthodox. There was a way in which to check Trump you need to be a bit –

MANSFIELD: They underestimated him and his attractiveness to people. But, you know, it's hard to blame them for that. Because this is unprecedented, that such a person as Trump could become our president.

## **II: (26:54 – 42:50) Party and Faction**

KRISTOL: I guess we've had many, many demagogues, and they've succeeded at various levels, of course. Senators, or leaders in other ways in the country, major figures, candidates. I guess what's unprecedented is to then win the nomination and then, especially, win the election. It's hard to really think of a president we've had who's – Of course, he is literally the first president we've had that hasn't held government office, of some kind or other, before becoming president.

MANSFIELD: Andrew Jackson would be a close substitute.

KRISTOL: But a long time ago, and what was he? Governor, and Senator, and military leader.

MANSFIELD: And the same with Teddy Roosevelt. Also very attractive rhetorically, but full of ideas, bursting with ideas. More than Trump, much more than Trump.

KRISTOL: But what about populism? That's the -ism that people use to describe Trump and Trumpism, I'd say, and merging conservatism with populism.

MANSFIELD: Populism really first began in a political party, I think, in the Democratic Party, with William Jennings Bryan. "Thou shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold." Splendid phrases like that. Which stood for a policy, however – the silver standard as opposed to gold standard. So he was talking about an idea.

And the Democrats stayed with him for three elections, amazingly, losing three times. So, showing that this had a certain lasting appeal. In this way, too, the parties introduce a kind of anti-demagogic flavor.

KRISTOL: So, let's talk about the parties. Because I think, if you want to ask an intelligent political scientist, "How do we deal with demagoguery?" one answer would be, "The Constitutional system." But another would certainly be, I think, "The political parties."

MANSFIELD: Parties stand for principles. And so going to, say, Hillary Clinton's consolation speech, or her – what is it – concession speech.

KRISTOL: I kind of like 'consolation.' It sounds grander, somehow.

MANSFIELD: She did propose this consolation, that we could stick together, and our party will continue, and we won't collapse or surrender. A demagogue would simply be defeated and slink away. But no, she's not that. She's a Democrat, and Democrats stand for something, certain principles, and they're going to be with us in 2020. And you Republicans better look out because –

In other words, the parties stand for principles which are lasting. Have certain durability; not forever, but – and those principles, sometimes, can change. Or policies can change, and the principles stay the same. At any rate, there's a package of principles and policies – which is sometimes vague or difficult to take apart, but still it exists – and it makes a difference between a party and a factious demagogue.

Now, the political scientists have great difficulty in distinguishing between a party and a faction. The great difficulty arises from their methodology, their scientific methodology, which says facts can be known but values cannot.

So you cannot know that a party is more valuable than a faction, or that – They all the time speak of the "party system." Why don't they speak of the "faction system?" Well that's because, despite themselves, they do have a certain feeling on behalf of parties: parties are good. In fact, I don't know of a political scientist who said parties are bad. They all think, today, parties are good. They don't say "good," they say, "they have a function." That's a fancier, more euphemistic way for saying that they're good. Because when you say "function," you don't mean a bad function, you mean something that does good for you. That is, it organizes opinion.

Parties stand in between us individuals and the country as a whole. And they bring us together sufficient to make a majority, so that the whole can be governed by that majority. Maybe that's not a bad definition, though it's pretty vague. I would especially wonder about the word "organize," because organizations, such as they're speaking of, is something which is public and not something which is secret or private. Therefore, they're really making a distinction between "party" and "conspiracy."

And there was a time when *all* party was considered to be conspiracy, even in a free country. It was alright to disagree or to be an opponent of a government, but to get together in what was called "a formed opposition" – this was in Great Britain – well, regular, organized in a regular way and in such a way to be publicly visible and held to be respectable and legitimate, that was wrong. That was changed, that opinion was changed, I think, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Britain, by Edmund Burke, and then in America, in the Jeffersonians.

Madison and Washington deplored parties. Actually, Madison, in *Federalist 10*, spoke of "the spirit of party and faction" as if party and faction were the same. They are the same in this, they have a certain zeal. They both make you contentious. But I think that the definition of faction was *against* rights, individual rights, and *against* the common good.

Suppose you had an organization that was in favor of rights and in favor of the common good – like Madison himself, together with Hamilton and the other Federalists, in other words, the American Founders – that would be an example of a party that was good. But it didn't call itself a party, because it wanted to stand for the whole. It still held to this old tradition that party is, by itself, something of a conspiracy.

So Jefferson came along, and made a party that was open and public. He wanted to return America to the republican greatness of its revolution, against these “oligarchical monocrats,” he called them, the Federalists. The Federalists got sort of named against their wish, as a party; they became a party stumbling into it without really wanting to be one.

But the thing about Jefferson’s Republicans was that it was just one party. So later on, it had to be shown that it was respectable to have more than one party. Going back a little bit to Burke, who would define party as “a body united upon some particular principle.” Now that’s not a “true” principle, but just a “particular” principle. And there are other particular principles. If you look at politics that way, that kind of pluralistic way, there isn’t a true principle, or at least, in practical terms, people won’t find one. They’ll only find a particular one that they like, and others will find –

So that leads to the way in which we speak of principle today, as somebody is “principled.” You are “principled,” and that means you don’t just act on your interest, you’ll sometimes act against your interest. That’s a sign that you’re acting on principle. You’ll do something which you ought not to like. A man who favors feminism, for example, would be a man of principle – though, not of interest.

Principle is a way of bringing some justice and some notion of good without some *particular* good or general good that you have to agree to. That’s what our parties, I think, stand for now; and therefore, one can make a distinction, in that way, between party and faction.

KRISTOL: So, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists didn’t accept this, let’s call it, “Burkean notion of parties?” The Federalists just thought, “We’re right,” or, “we’ll absorb whatever is correct about the Anti-Federalists and have these amendments to the Constitution.”

MANSFIELD: Well, Burke was talking about English gentlemen and *The Federalist* was talking about American citizens, revolutionary citizens. These are not deferential, English yeomen. These are –

KRISTOL: But they didn’t anticipate – [They thought] after the fight over the Constitution, these parties were going to go away, right?

MANSFIELD: No, they didn’t [anticipate it]. That’s right. They would go away, right. As soon as the country saw that “good administration would follow,” that was Hamilton’s phrasing. And that comes back to our can-do principle, that the ultimate test of a republic is not whether it’s republican, but whether it works.

And that’s what Trump accepted as his ultimate test when he made his acceptance speech. “It’s all very well for me to have won, but it won’t do my love of fame any good, it won’t do my reputation any good unless I do a great job.” *Great* job. So that’s, again, this American greatness and the American ambition. Which is both national and personal. He’s ambitious to make America great, but at the same time, and this is not incidental, he will make himself great.

KRISTOL: Is this a break, therefore, with Burke and with parties? Is Trump, in a sense, what Burke was trying to guard against when he invented government parties?

MANSFIELD: Yes, of course he was. He was what both Burke and Madison were opposed to. But now we’ve got our system in place, and our system consists of the Constitution, plus the parties, and plus the media.

We’ve been seeing, in the last three weeks, the accommodation of the Constitutional system of Congress, and not yet the Judiciary, to Trump. And he’s been making appointments of some seasoned – though conservative – politicians, who belong to the establishment.



KRISTOL: And to his party. He is not trying to transcend party differences, it doesn't seem. Which Trump could do as a demagogue; I mean, other demagogues have tried that, right?

MANSFIELD: No, he's not. So far he's not, right. There's no more anti-establishment figure in American politics since, really to compare with Trump, yet he owes his victory to two establishments: First, the Constitution, which sets up an Electoral College that enabled him to win even though he lost the popular vote. And second, the party system, because he won because Republicans came back to him. They voted for him not because he was Trump, but because he was Republican.

KRISTOL: He ran behind, sort of, the House Republican vote. He, of course, hates that. This might explain, he's recently been attacking, claiming that he would have won the popular vote if illegal voters hadn't voted. There seems to be not much basis for that claim, since he is going to lose the popular vote by two and a half million votes, or something. Maybe that's why he cares about that. He doesn't like being obligated or, what's the word I'm looking for, being dependent on the Electoral College.

MANSFIELD: He's an excellent off-hand liar.

KRISTOL: Yes. That's part of being a demagogue, too, I suppose.

MANSFIELD: I think so.

KRISTOL: He's lies so much you sort of – he lies unnecessarily, I would say, at times. Why is that? How does that fit into the theory of the demagogue?

MANSFIELD: Because it's not strategic; you can't predict it. He wants to be unpredictable. But he wants to cause surprise. I think that's calculated. He'll stick it to you, and try to bowl you over. As he's done just with this claim – everybody's talking about these millions of illegal voters, suddenly, who were prevented from doing their duty.

KRISTOL: Should we be alarmed that he's – he's so willing to use –

MANSFIELD: Yes! Donald, you've won. Stop it!

KRISTOL: So, is he right to think he needs to keep doing this, or is this ultimately not in his interest, in your opinion?

MANSFIELD: Time will tell.

KRISTOL: As they say.

MANSFIELD: Right. The chances are pretty good that he'll overreach at some point, but I don't think he's found it yet.

KRISTOL: I think those of us who are more conventional probably underestimate the utility of that constant surprise, and willingness to shock a little bit and say things that aren't true, then have the media complain for two or three days that it's not true, and then he gets to look like he's indifferent or above, somehow, these petty complaints.

MANSFIELD: Yes, by lying, he tells it like it is. Maybe that's a way to end.

KRISTOL: It certainly is. Thank you, Harvey, for that enlightening and thought-provoking conversation, here, three weeks after Donald Trump's startling and surprising victory. Thank you for being here, and thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]