

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

**Guest:** Charles Murray, Emeritus Scholar, American Enterprise Institute

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### **I: Right Questions, Wrong Answers (0:15 – 27:11)**

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol, welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased to be joined again by my good friend Charles Murray, America's pre-eminent social scientist. Well, I think it's true, but you can –

MURRAY: I like to hear it.

KRISTOL: You can demure, if you wish, in a fake demurral, or not. I'm just going to assert it.

Recently became a scholar emeritus, I think, at the American Enterprise Institute, where you have been for quite a while. And you are still active, obviously, in your scholarship, maybe fewer institutional responsibilities. So, congratulations on that.

MURRAY: Thank you.

KRISTOL: And you gave a talk. We are speaking in early February, you gave a talk exactly a month ago, at AEI, that is up on their website, the [video](#). I imagine it will be published somewhere, but people can look at it if they want. But it's so provocative and interesting that I thought it was worth having a follow-up conversation with you. You discuss your own intellectual trajectory, what you've learned. It's provocatively called, "Right Questions and Wrong Answers." You are much more modest than –

MURRAY: 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was actually my birthday that day, yeah.

KRISTOL: Happy birthday, belatedly. So, let's talk.

I first met you, I think when you published [Losing Ground](#) in 1984, which was such a path-breaking work in social science and did, I think, stimulate the welfare-reform movement and the welfare-reform legislation, ten, 12 years later. I remember reading the book when I was, I guess, an assistant professor at the Kennedy School at Harvard, being very shaped by it. I hear you have some second thoughts about it. So talk a little bit about that and then we'll go forward to your other works.

MURRAY: Well, *Losing Ground* was the apogee of my optimism. Which is to say that –

KRISTOL: Only for you a book called *Losing Ground* would be the –

MURRAY: You've heard of a low bar? Well. It was optimistic in this sense: I still thought at that time there were policy solutions, that were not politically feasible, but if you did them, they would have a huge effect.

I'll give you one example. In the last chapter, where I have some thought experiments, I had a thought experiment about a very thoroughgoing voucher system, which would leave the public-school system in place, but would provide everybody with enough money to go to a private school with a voucher. And I was convinced that would not only be a good thing, in the way I still think it would be a good thing, giving parents more control over their kids' education. I think there is a line in there saying, "If you want test-score discrepancies between disadvantaged groups and the rest to close within a generation, this is the way to do it." And so I was optimistic, not that the voucher system could be enacted, but it could be done.

And, as years went on after *Losing Ground*, I became a lot more aware of the way in which something can be a cause of a problem at one point in time, but reversing it isn't necessarily going to be the solution to the problem ten years later.

And here I think the good example is my thought experiment about getting rid of the welfare system. Because, in the last chapter of *Losing Ground*, where I said I don't have any practical solutions, I said, "Suppose that the entire welfare system went away." And I talked about the ways in which conversations between boyfriends and girlfriends would start to differ. Conversations – the way I put it then was, "Suppose that it were announced that nine months and one day from now that the entire welfare system is going to disappear: what kinds of conversations would parents have with their daughters tonight?"

Well, yeah, I think that I will still defend the proposition that the social reforms of the 1960s were a major contributor to the acceleration of out-of-wedlock births. But, once the economic realities of having a baby without a husband changed, the stigma started to erode as you had more and more births. And the social rewards for getting married and doing the right thing, they decayed.

And so, I had to come with terms to the fact that I don't think getting rid of the welfare system would in any way fully restore the same kind of milieu, in which teenage boys and teenage girls made decisions about this sort of thing.

KRISTOL: It seems to me there are two things – like you say and you suggest in the talk, but very briefly, so maybe you can elaborate – that you've been more struck by since *Losing Ground*. One is this, how should I say, that once something happens it has its own – it then becomes a cause, not simply an effect, to put it maybe in those terms. And it's not so easy to unwind, I guess that is the point you're making. There for you, it seems, family breakup is a very key thing?

MURRAY: Family breakup is a very key thing and it – Families only form in the first place because there are very powerful social and economic pressures when kids are 20 years old to do that thing. And that fabric has just frayed enormously, for low-income people.

KRISTOL: I want to come back to that, because that hasn't changed, right? I mean, the numbers of, in terms of out of wedlock births and so forth are –

MURRAY: Oh, it's now – among – well, the statistics on blacks have been notorious for years. Let's just talk about working-class whites. Best estimate, depending on what your definition of working class is, that about half of all children born to working-class mothers, white working-class mothers, are out of wedlock.

KRISTOL: Well, that is just so interesting. Let's stay on this for a minute because it's so important. And the data show that that remains a huge disadvantage?

MURRAY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I mean, we could have less stigma, we could have programs that –

MURRAY: Now, here you are verging onto another thing in which my views have changed.

KRISTOL: Okay, so let's just jump to that.

MURRAY: And I want to be very careful how I put this. Do I still think that it's really important for a child to grow up with two parents? Yes, I do. I think it's very important for the – for all the reasons I used to think it was. To go back to something I have been saying for years: a little boy doesn't learn how to be job ready and get up and go to work every day, even if he doesn't feel like it, because somebody teaches him that. He grows up [to do that] because he's watched dad do that. And if you don't have a dad that you watch do that – watching mom do that isn't the same thing. We know that an awful lot of kids who are in those situations don't make the connection that, "Gee, mom's working hard. I, a male, when I grow up, should work hard to take care of a wife and children."

So, anyway, there are all sorts of ways in which I think the two-parent family is still really important and the breakdown has caused huge problems in the city culture.

Here's the tricky part. That we also know, as we did not know in 1984 when I published *Losing Ground*, that it turns out, that what we think of as the environment that shapes children, which are things like socioeconomic status, the local schools, two-parent family and that, they actually play much-less role than we thought they did. This is referencing a very complex, large literature that I won't try to go into – except, I will say, it's settled science; a word that I can use with a straight face after the way it has been misused. It is settled science that this shared environment the siblings have explains far less about how they turn out than we thought it did. That the environmental effects that are important are much more likely to be peer groups or a variety of idiosyncratic circumstances. So, the family is still important, it is not as important as I used to think.

KRISTOL: That's really striking—so, explain that. So, it is still important, but not as important. So a shared environment means, in effect, the home, the parents, the –

MURRAY: Socioeconomic status.

KRISTOL: Reading to the little kids when they are 18-months-old, all the things one thinks of as an upper-middle-class parent that one thinks one is doing well by one's kids by providing them this, I guess, "shared environment," to use the term, is actually less important than one thinks?

MURRAY: Yeah. Basically, this is based on extensive literature of twin studies, because – and twins raised together. Because the nice thing about twins raised together is they are born in the same point in the marriage. Whereas two siblings that aren't twins can be born into completely different environments if the marriage is broken up or something.

They are born at the same time into the same circumstances; they share half of their genes just like siblings do, approximately half. Whereas identical twins have the same characteristics except they share virtually 100 percent of their genes. And with that as leverage, with large samples and comparing outcomes for identical twins and fraternal twins, you can disentangle what's causing what.

And so, the environment is still important. It's not the kind of things that lead parents to spend \$60 grand a year on private schools, you know? It's the kind of things over which they have very little control.

If people who think that's counter-intuitive, I just say to them, "Look, do you have a sibling? And if you have a sibling, think of all the ways you and your sibling are *really* different, and different for reasons that you can't put down to socioeconomic status or parenting or anything else."

KRISTOL: That's interesting. I think the upper-middle-class conventional answer to that will be, "Well, of course, we're different, but we still both benefitted so much from the shared environment and the books –

MURRAY: Yes, the shared genes.

KRISTOL: And so, these studies must show, one way I guess they studied this then is to compare – the main way is the identical twins to the fraternal twins.

MURRAY: Yes.

KRISTOL: And, I guess, what you are saying is identical twins are much, much more in common with each other than fraternal twins?

MURRAY: Whatever difference you have – if you have very large representative samples, if you specify that – the difference in outcomes between the fraternal twins and the identical twins in a large sample has to be explained by genes. That's the only – that's the distinguishing feature.

KRISTOL: They're each growing up in – you need to control for it.

MURRAY: Yeah, it's an algebraic thing.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURRAY: Whereby, if you share 50 percent in one sample, and you share 100 percent of genes with the other sample, you can work it out.

KRISTOL: And everyone is otherwise growing up similarly, so to speak. As you say, they are born at the same time, you can make, you can correct for everything else.

MURRAY: Yeah. By the way, people who are watching this – there are going to be some people watching this who know this literature well and they'll say, "Oh, Murray is really not giving a clear picture of what's going on." Other people who have never heard of this literature say, "What is this man saying? How can he be so confident it's genes?" I recommend to everybody that this is really interesting stuff and they should look into it.

KRISTOL: Any one or two books for a semi-layman or semi-layperson would be?

MURRAY: Oh yeah, there was a bestselling one, of Judith Harris. It's –

KRISTOL: It was fifteen years ago, I think. *Nature, Nurture*?

MURRAY: *Nature, Nurture*, and I can't remember the precise title of the book.

KRISTOL: [\*The Nurture Assumption\*](#).

MURRAY: *The Nurture Assumption*. It was a bestseller in the late 1990s. It's still scientifically valid.

KRISTOL: That's interesting, yeah. So that points one towards heredity, I suppose, and so, that points one also to your famous book, [\*The Bell Curve\*](#), which you wrote with Richard Herrnstein. So talk a little bit about that.

MURRAY: Well, heredity is – yeah, I did change my mind on that as well. I wasn't as conscious of the role of heredity in the 1980s as I became when I was working on *The Bell Curve*. And it's not that genes are everything; they're not; the environment is quite important.

But I'll tell you what really did sink in with me. You can say of any one characteristic – let's say it's IQ, which is what *The Bell Curve* was about. And so, there I, along with Dick Herrnstein, my co-author, we put in italics all sorts of times that IQ is just one of many features that go into determining success, etc., etc.

But then I was saying to myself, and I've been saying this as early as *In Pursuit* – a book I published in 1988 – I'm saying that, yeah, *but what about the person who gets the short end of the stick on a whole bunch of things?* So he has not only got an IQ of 90, which is a little below average, he is not really very handsome, he's not really very charming, he's not super diligent. And in none of these ways is he a bad person; but he really got the short end of the stick in a whole bunch of dimensions. And so, he's not going to be famous and rich and get satisfactions from that kind of success.

The question that then became really central to me is, okay, *how does this guy live a satisfying life, a deeply satisfying life?* And that's what pushed me toward the emphasis that I have had in things that I've written ever since 1988 on family, vocation, community and faith as being the four domains – Arthur Brooks calls them “the institutions of meaning,” which is a nice phrase – within which people of a very wide range of abilities can get to be my age and they can be proud of themselves and genuinely satisfied with who they've been and what they've done.

But the trick is, and this also characterizes my work since 1988, those four institutions have to be rich and vital. Communities have to be rich and vital, families do, vocation does and faith traditions do, too.

KRISTOL: That seems to be – you tended to argue, I want to come back to [\*In Pursuit\*](#), your book from 1988 that is less well-known, I would say, than the ones before or after.

MURRAY: It's my own favorite.

KRISTOL: Your own favorite, so let's explain why. But one argument you've made since then is that our society is peculiarly badly set up to help less-advantaged people find this kind of meaningful satisfaction that you talk about.

MURRAY: Well, let me amend that. That the way the society was originally set up – Now, whenever you say that, you have to have the caveat: slavery was a bad thing.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURRAY: The ideals of the Constitution and of the Declaration, they really did create vital communities and vital families. It's the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is the most libertarian period of American history in which you go to communities, including urban communities, and they are just seething with voluntary associations and religiously oriented groups and just simply neighbors doing things with neighbors to solve problems.

And so I look at that, I look at how much they accomplished in an era of vastly less wealth than we have now, and I say don't tell me about free societies and libertarian societies being atomistic. We were the opposite of atomistic. And what really bothers me about American civil society now is that the energy of those institutions, particularly community and family, have been vitiated.

KRISTOL: And, why? I mean, just inevitable modernity or big government or –

MURRAY: If you think about it for a minute, you can conceive of the entire social-welfare-state project as saying to people, “We are here to take some of the trouble out of life. We are going to provide these supports, which will take some of the trouble out of being unemployed, which will take some of the trouble out of having a baby without a husband, some of the trouble out of” – And you can just go

through a whole list of things. And so there are a variety of functions, which if the family didn't do them or the community didn't do them, they wouldn't get done, which will now, in a kind of half-assed fashion, get done because of a nanny state, the welfare state.

And, it's – hardly anyone, political constituency, stands up and says, "No, don't do this for us. It's not good for us." So, it is accreted over time, extensively in Europe, increasingly in the United States. And what we've done is we've shifted the function of community and family downtown. We have given them, some of them over to other places. So, guess what? Marriage isn't as important as it used to be; the neighborhood isn't as important as it used to be. But that's a function of policy.

KRISTOL: And why is this particularly bad, though, for those on the bottom half of the spectrum, in terms of background or aptitude?

MURRAY: Because people like you and me can fool ourselves, if necessary. Well, we've got one of the four institutions of meaning – namely, vocation, in which we have been successful, and we're filming our conversations and we've done well in our vocations. And so, in a way – suppose we have rotten family and community and faith, we can still sort of cling to that.

KRISTOL: You've been lucky in the –

MURRAY: I have to say that, as you get older, this kind of thing gets less important, as you and I both know; but we have that going for us.

If you are sort of, gotten the short end of the stick that I've talked about, being a good parent and spouse is still a role that's open to you. It's still a source of deep satisfaction. But that's one that you better take, because some of your other options have been foreclosed. Similarly, you can be a good neighbor and be in a community; you can be a good, devoted to your faith tradition. But those are the only games in town.

And so, we are sort of the opposite of where we should be. We talk all the time about celebrity and money and these kinds of trappings. That's what is defined as "success" by an awful lot of kids. And the idea that you're supposed to take deep satisfaction in getting married and slogging away at a job and supporting kids, the culture doesn't back that up very much. The culture says if you aren't rich or famous, you're nobody.

KRISTOL: So there's the cultural lack of backing up of being a family man and a volunteer in the church and so forth.

MURRAY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: And then, I suppose, you also make a point, I think, the way in which the modern welfare state works, the laws and the regulations and the ability to navigate it all, disproportionately helps the more clever among us. Somehow in the old, in an older time you could – it was simpler to be, there were simpler paths to relative success.

MURRAY: Look, I mean, it's just an example that I happen to encounter, but there are thousands of them. Along Route 340 between where I live in Harpers Ferry, on the weekends you can, during the summer, buy barbecue from people who pull up in a truck and they sell it out of the back of the truck and so forth.

And I got in a conversation with them once and they sort of went through the hoops they had to jump through in order to be allowed to sell to people passing by in cars barbecue. And, did they surmount those? Yeah. Do we make it as tough as possible for people to do things like that? Yeah, we do that, too.

We make it as tough as possible to put an addition onto your house; we make it as tough as possible to do all sorts of simple things. And if you have enough money, you can hire lawyers to take care of that. Or you have assistants who do the paperwork or the rest of it. Or, because we have cognitive skills, we can decipher the paperwork and all of that.

We have crafted a world in which complexity seems to rule, in terms of the regulations and a variety of other things, because complexity is what the lucky people, in terms of IQ, are good at. So, we're really happy with –

And, by the way, it gives us all sorts of jobs, if we're attorneys or other things, because we have this complex world that we run. We have screwed, to use a technical term, people who are just trying to do ordinary things, don't hurt anybody, trying to improve their own lives, made it tough for them.

KRISTOL: And you don't think that this is simply a necessary or inevitable consequence of modernity, automation, technology, I don't know, you know, people needing more-educated skills to work with the modern economy? I mean, obviously there might be some truth to it, but not – I guess I'm –

MURRAY: Yeah, is it tougher?

KRISTOL: That is sort of the excuse, I think, maybe people might use in saying, "No, no, it's not that we have done this, had much of a choice," I guess.

MURRAY: Well, okay. First, I will say there is no need to have made a lot of this stuff as complicated as we have. And so, if you're going to be, for example, on the left, I would like to see people on the left saying that this is damaging the lives of people we care deeply about because we're social-justice warriors.

But, having said that, there are aspects of modernity that also make this a lot tougher and they have a lot to do with the technology. And here's where I have new reasons to be depressed that I did not have in 1984.

There's a guy named Robert Nozick, a famous philosopher, wrote a book called *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* that I still think is one of the most brilliant books I have ever written [sic]. He's a libertarian philosopher. Anyway, he had a thing called an "experience machine" in there. And the experience machine was one that you could hook yourself up to and it would be virtual reality, whereby you had no way of knowing you were not actually engaged in that alternative reality. And should you just plug yourself into that for the rest of your life as opposed to living this dull, drab life you really live? And in *In Pursuit* in 1988, I used that and say, "No, no, no; human life has a dignity and a weight," etc.

Have you tried virtual reality recently?

KRISTOL: And in Nozick also – wasn't that the point of that?

MURRAY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: In Nozick's book too, that was the point.

MURRAY: Yeah.

KRISTOL: That you shouldn't do it.

MURRAY: I can't remember how Nozick used it and I used it, but we were in the same ballpark. Here's the thing. I don't know if you have put on any reality glasses, I haven't either. I have been told by people

that have used virtual reality as it exists now, it is spookily good. That within a few minutes, it's very hard for you to realize that what you're doing is not operating in a real environment.

Well, let's do a trend line here. Let's think in terms of Donkey Kong and Ms. Pac Man and so forth in the 1980s and do a line up to where we are in terms of the videogames now. Extend that out ten years, extend that out twenty years. That experience machine is not that far away.

So I'm a 22 year old kid, I don't want to go to work as a greeter at Walmart. I don't want to take the trouble to learn how to be a welder and make a really good salary and have a craft that I'm proud of. But for a couple of hundred bucks, I can immerse myself in these alternate realities or I can take opioids or other things.

Well, that – it's understandable that people make that choice. You know, the dystopian novel that is increasingly persuasive is [\*Brave New World\*](#). It's not *1984*, it's *Brave New World*.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that ages very well, I would say.

MURRAY: What you said before, my reaction is, is it necessary for us to have this during modernity? No, it's not necessary. Are there all sorts of ways that make that the line of least resistance? Yeah.

KRISTOL: And our policies don't push back against it, they accentuate it.

MURRAY: Our policies and our culture. And this is where I get very exercised – like I said, exercised in the last few minutes in talking about that. Those of us who have been lucky enough, as we have, to have had wonderful families, both when we were growing up, but also the women we married and the children we've had, have been deeply satisfying. And I have lived in communities that have been great sources of satisfaction to me. My wife has been deeply engaged in the faith tradition and sort of convinced me I better get more engaged in it.

So all of these things in our own lives, we ought to be, as people who are the lucky ones in society, we ought to be sponsoring a culture which says to people *this is better than a reality game*. It's better than a virtual reality, it's better than dope, it's better than drugs. These are the things that are worth having.

We don't do that. We enjoy these – and by 'we' I mean sort of the new upper class – we still enjoy these deep sources of satisfaction. We don't create a culture which makes them accessible to other people.

## **II: *In Pursuit* & the Apollo Program (27:11 – 46:36)**

KRISTOL: Your emphasis on culture, I think, you've always, obviously, understood and in fact, *Losing Ground* was about the culture that was created by the incentives, I guess, for the welfare state. But as you said earlier, in a way, the conclusion was a way, if we reverse the incentives, the culture will reverse.

Do you generally think, though, that incentives per se are just less, a little less important than you thought? I mean, Libertarians, of which you sort of consider yourself one, do tend to put an awful lot of weight on economic incentives which I think a lot of times is, of course, quite reasonable. Are you a little less of an economist and a little more of a cultural historian?

MURRAY: I'm more of a group person in the sense that suppose you have a situation in which – well, one that I've often used. Suppose that you had a guaranteed income, which I still do advocate. And I am saying that replaces Social Security, but the guaranteed income is enough that people can put money by or that there are ways in which they can invest and do a lot better in their retirement than they do with Social Security.



And people say to me, “Oh, but you can’t expect ordinary people to make – They will just fritter away their money and they won’t invest in a balanced portfolio and all of that.” It’s not that I believe that each individual will do that, but I do think that if you had a situation in which everybody had to take care of their own retirement, the conversation at the local coffee shop would not be about, “Oh, I’ve got this great stock-tip that will quadruple my money in six months.” It would be that all at once [people would say], “balanced portfolios and diversification and things.” In the coffee shop it would become – the people who thought about this would be saying “the right incentives are to go with this kind of strategy.” Everybody wouldn’t think it through, but they would generally follow the lead.

In the case of vouchers for schools, you aren’t going to have every single parent that is going to go out and evaluate the teachers and the schools. But schools will get reputations and they’ll get reputations based on solid criteria.

So I do have faith that a free society can create a situation in which they make it easier for people to make decisions that will be good for them in the long-term, and part of that is by following the example of people who have thought these things through.

KRISTOL: That’s very interesting. It very much speaks to me. When I was at the Education Department we, sort of on the side without thinking about it much, helped support the very early home schooling movement just out of a kind of Reagan-eyed view that they should have the right to do what they want. But I got to say, I thought – and it was under much more attack than people might realize from state authorities who just tried to prevent it. It wasn’t even – they tried to prevent it partly by highly regulating it and in some cases just to prevent it. And we sort of were on the legal side of the parents when I worked for Bill Bennett there.

But I always thought home schooling, I mean, every individual is going to figure out the curriculum, it’s a little – I mean, I am not sure I could do it. I am fairly well educated and it is asking an awful lot of people and they have jobs, isn’t it kind of fanciful?

But I, of course, didn’t think, this is why, because it is such an important point, I did think too atomistically and not in terms of groups. And of course once – and especially with the internet – but once things got going, there was going to be some good home schooling curriculum that, word of mouth or the internet would quickly convey to a lot of other people. And they didn’t have to individually research every math curriculum; they just had to be told that the Kahn Academy works and then they could just go teach their kid the Kahn Academy, or not even teach their own kid. Because they would go, also find some tutor who is offering his services or her services if necessary for part-time amplification of the home schooling.

I mean, the extent to which this sort of, the Libertarian argument gets to your book, *In Pursuit*, which is I think your favorite of your books. The extent to which the Libertarian argument is not an individualistic argument is wildly –

MURRAY: It’s little platoons. It’s deeply embedded in little platoons. And actually the internet, for all the ways in which it is problematic, look at the way in which it has liberated information. And so I guess actually as a social scientist, I would like to see good studies. I don’t buy anything anymore without looking up some of the reviews.

KRISTOL: Right.

MURRAY: And I am a big enthusiast of Uber and Air B&B and all these others in which the purveyors of the service rate the customers and the customers rate the service and you have these information flows. To what extent are all of these good things that make it easier for us to get that wonderful curriculum, because we got online and we’ve seen that E.D Hirsch’s curriculum is the best and so we download that one when we homeschool our kids – what are the facts about whether people are using the internet across the range of society? I don’t know.

KRISTOL: Has that been studied that much? I don't know.

MURRAY: I'm sure it has. There's got to be answers out there, but I don't know what they are.

KRISTOL: There is a way in which the Internet can be, can help in the formation of communities, not just hurt. And it's too simple, I think, to say it atomizes everything, though it certainly has that tendency, too, I think.

MURRAY: Well, how about if you want to be, and there are such people, a handyman. You're really good at fixing things, and it's a good way to make a good hourly salary and if you can put together enough hours, a good living. And it's hard to find people like that. Well, it's a lot easier to find them with Angie's List and other kinds of websites than it used to be before. It's a much more reasonable alternative for somebody who is really good with his hands to say I'm going to do that for a living. So there are lots of ways in which we are being empowered, the word that I don't use any more than I have to. But we are being empowered, including people who have disadvantages of various kinds.

KRISTOL: And I guess that would take one back to the policy questions, do we impose all kinds of barriers, occupational licensing and stuff –

MURRAY: Oh, yeah.

KRISTOL: – and stuff, that makes it unnecessarily hard for people to empower themselves.

MURRAY: So the handyman, if the county or supervisors or if the state legislature hears about it, you can be sure they'll say, "Oh well, we got to license the handyman," I know.

The internet also makes it easier to find the guy and pay him off the books, if you want to think of it that way.

KRISTOL: Not that we're recommending that. Well, say right, *In Pursuit*, because I mean, it's not your best known book and it is your favorite book. I imagine many fewer people have read it than *Losing Ground* or –

MURRAY: It has kind of a cult following.

KRISTOL: Yes, there is a cult following, which is good. How did you come to right it next? You wrote *Losing Ground* and you have become pretty well known, this sort of expert on –

MURRAY: Then I decided to write about IQ. Oh, you mean before?

KRISTOL: *In Pursuit*.

MURRAY: Oh, before *In Pursuit*. Oh, *In Pursuit* was the book that I was, that I quit my day job to write. You know, I get a little, irritated isn't the right word, but [the idea that] "I was a nobody" until *Losing Ground* came out? Well, I was the chief scientist of a large Washington office of a well-respected research institute. I actually was doing pretty good.

And I quit that job because I was tired of writing government reports that nobody ever read. And also because of, in my own personal life, I was acutely aware of how unhappy I was in a bad marriage at that time. And so I decided I wanted to explore the relationship between public policy and happiness, which is kind of a weird way to respond to the unhappiness of your personal life, but that's the way I did respond.

And so I had it in my mind from the late 1970s on that I wanted to explore this intersection of public policy and happiness. And it turned out that I had to kind of clear away the underbrush first by writing *Losing Ground*. Because what I was really an expert on, as of the early 1980s, was the way government programs work on the ground as opposed to the way the rhetoric says it. But I finally did get around to writing that book and that's where I zeroed in on happiness as "lasting and justified satisfaction with life as a whole," which is a very Aristotelian way of looking at it. That's where I used Abraham Maslow's needs hierarchy to sort of talk about the things that human beings need in order to pursue happiness and came up with the institutions of meaning that are the vehicles through which we do it.

So that arose way before I had come onto a public scene with *Losing Ground*.

KRISTOL: And that book, I looked at it quickly before this interview, seems to stand up very well. It is not as time-sensitive, so to speak, as *Losing Ground*.

MURRAY: No, it's not at all time-sensitive. And it actually has served as kind of the seed bed for a lot of things I have done since. You will find echoes of *In Pursuit* in just about every book I wrote subsequently with the exception, actually, the most recent one, [\*By the People\*](#).

KRISTOL: And right after *In Pursuit* you wrote a book that I actually like very much and has a cult following – has more than a cult following maybe, the book on the space program which you and Catherine wrote, right?

MURRAY: Yes, my wife and I –

KRISTOL: But you present that in this talk as sort of a diversion, but I don't think that's quite fair. There's some serious lessons in that, so to speak.

MURRAY: Oh yes, there are serious lessons. I guess I should elaborate a little bit.

KRISTOL: Yeah, please.

MURRAY: Because after all, if I can't indulge myself by telling war stories now, when can I?

So at the time that *Losing Ground* was about to be published, I was unemployed. I had gotten, in effect, an advance against royalties from the Manhattan Institute to write *Losing Ground*. I didn't expect it to do much of anything. Catharine didn't, my wife. And I did not have a fellowship there. So we needed to do something to make a living.

And for various reasons we got really interested in the story of the Apollo program in terms of the people on the ground, the flight controllers, the people who designed the Saturn V and the rest of that. And so we had written a book proposal and sent it out. And actually, I remember going to meet our new agent, Amanda Urban, for the first time. She'd agreed to handle the book on the basis of our proposal for *Apollo* and I had my first bound copy of *Losing Ground* that I had gotten the very day I met her the first time.

And I remember sort of carrying my baby in there, sitting down with her and sort of saying something about this is my book I have just done. And Binky, her nickname is Binky, sort of wiped that aside – no, that is not going to do anything, but the Apollo book might.

And so we were doing *Apollo*, a journalist account to write a bestseller. Now that was our intention and we wrote a book that we really loved. We loved doing the research. It does have serious stories to tell about, about an entrepreneurial government enterprise which took enormous risks which was done by kids.

*Apollo 13* which is a movie that a lot of people watching have seen, very popular movie, has these flight directors who are the heroes of it, those guys were in their mid-30s and the other people in the mission control were often in their mid-20s. And they were given this huge responsibility and look what they accomplished. So yeah, *Apollo* had, it's a serious book in the sense of it's a story that is worth knowing, but mainly it was just lots of fun.

KRISTOL: Are you an enthusiast for the space program sort of going forward?

MURRAY: Oh, NASA became a bureaucracy by the time they landed on the moon. I mean, NASA, until we got to the moon was like this start-up. You had people jumping over lines of authority doing what needed to be done, forgetting about bureaucracy. NASA became a bureaucracy.

The inspiring story just happened yesterday.

KRISTOL: Yeah, let's talk about that.

MURRAY: Which is yesterday, as we are taping this –

KRISTOL: Early February.

MURRAY: Yeah, you had the Falcon Heavy of the Elon Musk, his space thing, which is the largest thrust, I believe, since the Saturn V, capable of lifting very large payloads completely privately done. And you have NASA which sort of keeps mumbling about going to Mars or going back to the moon and never, just being, marching in place, and you have a private organization that is going to take us back to space again big time.

And if you look at the video of the launch with all the people in that organization cheering madly for five minutes continuously as the launch proceeds through all its phases. And then you look at, when they show shots of that room jam packed with 20-somethings screaming their lungs out as they are so pleased with what they have accomplished. And that makes me optimistic again.

KRISTOL: Let me just say that, you are not pro-NASA, but you're a pro, you think it would be good to explore space.

MURRAY: Oh, yeah.

KRISTOL: I mean, that is an important part of being somehow human and –

MURRAY: It's the human spirit. Yeah, I'm very enthusiastic about it.

KRISTOL: It is an amazing story. I don't know if people have really written that up enough, I mean, that NASA spends X zillion dollars – I am sure this is a little unfair for a million reasons – and Elon Musk spends, you know, 1/100<sup>th</sup> of X million dollars.

MURRAY: That there might be a lesson in that?

KRISTOL: Yeah, I know, isn't there?

MURRAY: Yeah. Well, we interviewed the Apollo people in the mid-1980s when they were in the space shuttle phase. And I'll take time to tell a little story because it's very emblematic. The hero in *Apollo 13*, the movie, was a guy named Gene Kranz and I was interviewing Gene Kranz. And I was talking to him about their decision to continue the flight to the moon of Apollo 12 after the Saturn V had been hit by lightning while it was in the launch phase, hit twice by lightning and all of the systems had been knocked

offline. Three hours later these 20-somethings and young 30-somethings make the decision, “No, we’re going to go ahead to the moon. We have checked things out, we are good to go.”

And when you think about it, that is a very gutsy decision. And Gene Kranz is trying to say to me, “No, no, we checked things out. We knew the vehicle was good.” And this was after the Challenger accident that I was interviewing and I said, “Gene, given the same situation now, would NASA ever make the same decision?” Gene was very loyal to NASA and he glared at me. And when Gene Kranz glared at you, you quailed. And then he broke into laughter because there was no chance in hell that NASA would ever make that same kind of decision again.

And Elon Musk and his people would make that kind of decision again.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I would be curious to see how this progresses and whether the government tries to step on, or corral sort of, the private space program. I don't know, I haven't really followed that.

MURRAY: I suppose they will and I suppose they already have a lot of regulations that have been holding them back. But I’ve got to say after what happened yesterday, there surely has to be a groundswell of people saying, “Leave them alone, let them do this stuff.”

KRISTOL: I am struck, just as everyone in society, I guess has been, but I mean it is pretty striking for society to get to the moon in '69, go back several times in the next five –

MURRAY: Three years.

KRISTOL: And then stop.

MURRAY: And then just stop.

KRISTOL: And regress, really. If I’m not mistaken, when I was in government, we could do less 15 years later. I mean, literally that we couldn’t, that we didn’t have the thrust.

MURRAY: We could not do that.

KRISTOL: We couldn’t even replicate it. It wasn’t that we just were stable, you know.

MURRAY: If you go down to the Houston Space Center, there is a Saturn V on exhibit there lying on its side. That is not a model, it is not – it’s a fully operational Saturn V. All you needed to do was put gas in it which was never used. Because space was no longer sexy in the 1970s.

We kept talking about, *here’s how many poor people we can feed for one Saturn V launch*. I don't say that to be denigrating to poor people; I say that just to talk about the poverty of the human imagination that makes that kind of judgment about here’s what is worth doing and here’s what is not.

KRISTOL: And not to draw on this too long, but the space shuttle, which struck me as a bizarre kind of thing to land on as the heart of the space program for the next 20 or 30 years. It’s like, like let’s have the most – I am sure there’s some scientific utility to it, I don't mean to minimize it, be a know nothing here, but I mean, really, that is the best thing we can do was kind of go back and forth to the space station?

MURRAY: Yeah. Well, don't get me started.

KRISTOL: It certainly lost the public imagination.

MURRAY: There’s an argument to be made that by going to the moon we sort of exhausted people’s interest in the space program. And if had done a space station first, and if we had a longer term program,

we might have kept up momentum. But going to the moon was such a big deal, it was like – well, I guess an analogy with sex I was going to make would probably be inapropos. Anyway, a lot of the energy disappeared very quickly after the first moon landing.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it is a striking study. I guess there are historical analogies of countries, huge discoveries and then just sort of deciding well, that was interesting to discover and we're not actually going to go back there for X number of decades, we're busy doing local wars in Europe or something.

MURRAY: It was sort of emblematic of the '70s that we said, "Oh well, never mind."

KRISTOL: Yeah, I think I am struck by that.

### **III: *Coming Apart* (46:36 – 1:03:00)**

KRISTOL: Let's jump forward to your most recent book, if that's okay.

MURRAY: The really depressing one.

KRISTOL: Well no, so your second most recent book. Well, we could do your most recent book, too. Do you want to do that one first?

MURRAY: No, we can do in sequence.

KRISTOL: [Coming Apart](#). So I mean, *Coming Apart* caused a huge ruckus, a splash. I don't know if you expected it to, much or not.

MURRAY: Not really.

KRISTOL: Yeah, in 2012. And then sort of after the fact people have decided, I think correctly, ahead of the curve, it sort of explains Trump in some sort of complicated way. So say a word about the book. I think we have discussed it on a previous *Conversations*, but especially now since six years later, whether things have changed. Presumably there's new data that you have had a chance to rethink some things that don't stand up. Maybe you should summarize the thesis first and then –

MURRAY: Well, the thesis is that we developed new kinds of classes. That we have a new upper class that is different because it doesn't only have more money than the former upper class, it also has a completely different culture. It is not made up of people who have high school diplomas but have become great successes in building businesses; but is made of people who went to elite schools, have graduate degrees and so forth and so on.

And you have a new lower class which is not the urban underclass as we used to think of it. It is much broader. It is certainly multi-ethnic and I focus specifically on whites. That working class whites have fallen away from the industriousness, the religiosity, the honesty and from marriage, these kinds of institutions upon which the American project depends, and they are becoming disconnected from the rest of society.

And the third part of it which actually I think is in some ways the most important is the degree to which these two new classes despise each other. And it's the, not just the working class, but up through the middle class that is quite conscious that you have this new upper class of which I hate to tell you Bill, you and I are members, which condescends and looks down on ordinary Americans. Considers them to be stupid in a lot of cases, "deplorable" to coin a word. People understand that.

And that the antagonism – which I did identify in *Coming Apart*, and talked about, and I chastised the new upper class for isolating them[selves] from it – but in 2012 I had no idea how deep that ran. How

deep the resentment ran, from the bottom up, and how deep the condescension was from the top down. And we all found out, didn't we, in 2015 and '16 and '17?

KRISTOL: And how big the gulf was, I guess, right? That famous test that people –

MURRAY: The bubble quiz, yeah.

KRISTOL: So what has changed?

MURRAY: The new lower class found a leader. No, I shouldn't have said it that way. It wasn't just the new lower class; it's a much broader group of irritated Americans who were tired of being talked down to. Who were tired of being told that they shouldn't worry about immigration, that immigration, the economists all said it's a net plus, plus – net win. By the way, I'm not arguing with those economic arguments.

I'm saying if you're a carpenter who used to make \$18 dollars an hour and now you're making \$13 because you're competing against illegal aliens who are not getting Social Security benefits. Is that guy right to be angry? Yeah, he's right to be angry.

And the same goes for all sorts of other things whereby we can debate on an intellectual plane the pros and cons of the various policies, but we ought to be a lot more aware of how they are affecting people on the ground.

KRISTOL: Has the data changed though? I mean, is the actual situation over six years appreciably changed much one way or the other? There's been something of an economic recovery –

MURRAY: No, the numbers on marriage have remained fairly stable, but they were pretty bad. So that with people who have college degrees and graduate degrees and things, they are still getting married, they are staying married, they're doing well.

At the time I did *Coming Apart*, you were down to about half of all working class whites ages 30 to 49 who were married and it's about the same place now. You had a very slow recovery from the recession in terms of people going back to work. That has gotten better, by the way, in the last several months, I am told.

In terms of the continued collapse of religiosity, it hasn't gotten better. It is an odd kind of thing. I can't document this chapter and verse. My sense is that religion is getting much more respectable in the upper reaches of society. I mean, the fact that you have *The New York Times* editorial page has Ross Douthat who is an observant Catholic and writes often about spiritual issues, and David Brooks who I won't try to characterize his faith tradition, but he's certainly writing about deeply religious and spiritual issues a lot of times in a column there. Arthur Brooks is writing about the same kinds of things, again, in *The New York Times*, but you also have that kind of thing in *The Washington Post* more than you have had.

So in some sense there is an argument to be made that, who knows, religiosity may be making a comeback in some sections of society. I have seen no data or indications that the same thing is happening in the working class.

KRISTOL: So that analysis of the huge – and I think one aspect of the gulf is the declining rate, correct me if I'm wrong, of social mobility or upward mobility from one class to the other. Is that pretty clear in the data?

MURRAY: Yeah. Americans do not get up and go where the jobs are in the same way we used to, nor are people encouraged to do so. Again, the culture used to celebrate – “Oh, Americans are always packing up stakes and going off to where the grass is greener.” And that was part of what being an

American was all about. And that is not celebrated anymore, either. It's not that we have discontinuities between the way people are behaving and the cultural signals that are being sent; they are very much reinforcing each other.

KRISTOL: And how much of that is due to kind of sorting where people are, because of IQ, sorting themselves out into classes? And so the kids of the upper middle class just are a higher aptitude than the average – I mean, talking about groups and not about individuals – of the working class, and therefore it's just harder. I mean, there used to be more people who were by accident, so to speak, in the working class because they had just come over on a boat, you know.

MURRAY: Well, you had two things going on. One was that a lot of the talent was among people with high school diplomas. Yeah, when 10 percent of the population goes to college, guess what? Most of the really, really smart people are coming out of high school educations and so you had huge reservoirs of talent.

And one of the paradoxes of "meritocracy," a word that I use with irony rather than approbation, is that you get a lot of churning in the beginning. So Al Murray got a high school diploma, couldn't go to college, no money, had to support his family. But he becomes successful and he sends his kids to colleges, including me, to Harvard. And so that is social mobility in generations.

But my kids all have been in that world, your kids have all been in the world that we entered when we went off to college.

And as more and more people with talent get a chance to fulfill that talent, the more they tend to migrate into a class, a cohesive class and the stickier it is. Because they are passing along to their kids not just the money they managed to accumulate; they are passing along the talents that got them where they are. So you got a much stickier social structure than it used to be. That's one aspect of it.

But another aspect is this kind of segregation you're talking about where all sorts of opportunities that are actually out there don't get communicated. An example from my own life: we live out in a little town in rural Maryland and we went to a very pedestrian high school, local high school. There were some really smart kids in my daughter's and son's high school classes. I mean, we're talking, they could do really well at Harvard and Yale and Princeton. They never considered that. It's not that Harvard would necessarily turn them down, although as white working class kids, they get, they're sort of last to get preferential treatment at Harvard and Yale. But they were plenty smart enough to, and they could have gone to other selective schools, but it didn't cross their minds. That there were no other people except for my daughter who were heading off to one of these selective schools.

She went to Middlebury, of all places, given my recent history with Middlebury. She loved the school and we love the school. But when she told her friends that she was going off to Vermont to Middlebury, a common reaction she got was, "Oh, are your parents moving to Vermont?" Because why else would you go to Vermont to school, instead of going to Frostburg State or whatever?

KRISTOL: Now what does the data suggest about – assuming there's another girl who is as smart as your daughter and has the same basic, decent, good character and so forth. Your daughter goes to Middlebury, she goes to University of Maryland or maybe Frostburg State. Do they end up in a society as open to this graduate of the University of Maryland or Frostburg State doing as well as the graduate of Middlebury or Harvard? Are the kind of connections you make there terribly helpful or does that just fade away pretty quickly and everyone is –

MURRAY: I personally have never thought the connections thing is as big a deal.

KRISTOL: People make so much of it.



MURRAY: But what happens when you have gone to Middlebury or to Stanford or whatever it is you are aware of? Well, if I really want to go into such-a-such a career, if I want to go work for Goldman Sachs or whatever: this is the next step. And if you have gone to Frostburg State, you are not nearly as much exposed to those kinds of things.

And the other thing that doesn't happen is cultural. If you had lots more kids at Middlebury who have gone to ordinary little working class high schools, it would be really healthy for Middlebury student body to have a lot more of those kids mixed in with the ones who are coming out of the private schools in New York City and Washington D.C. and so forth.

The culture within colleges – The problem with the segregation we've been talking about so far is the ways in which it disadvantages ordinary Americans. The problems associated with the way it disadvantages, as it were, the new upper class are also real.

When I looked out and watched those kids at Middlebury screaming at me last March, I was saying to myself, you know, these kids have no idea of what the real world is like. I mean, they were talking in the run-up to my speech there and the issues that are alive in Middlebury involving, whether it's transgender rights or whether it's their idea of social justice and so forth.

It is so disconnected from the problems facing somebody trying to make a living now. And the problems faced, not by the most oppressed people in the society, but just by ordinary folks. That's what they are ignorant of, that's what the bubble quiz was all about.

Trying to get them to understand if you were dropped off a bus in some little town in Kansas, you wouldn't have a clue. You wouldn't know – it would be like you had gone to some exotic foreign country. That was what I was trying to get across to them. And that's un-American, that should not be true.

KRISTOL: All right, suppose it was always true of a certain very rarefied group of Boston aristocrats and whatever, and the fact there's quite a lot of fiction and so forth about this –

MURRAY: And it was a very small group.

KRISTOL: But it was a tiny group and now it is a big group, I guess.

MURRAY: Well, there's a reason it was called the New York 400. And it was 400. And the same with Beacon Hill [in Boston].

And the funny thing is, of course, about Harvard, at the time Harvard was dominated by those kinds of people. It also had a very large body of commuting students who were working class, oftentimes Jewish, Boston kids. And they were there in the same classrooms and, in many ways, providing more interaction across socioeconomic classes than you have in Harvard today.

KRISTOL: Well, that is a good point you make. There's that window where a lot of very bright kids from working class or modest backgrounds make it and huge social mobility and interaction. But in a way, that presents –

MURRAY: That's the Harvard I attended, 1961 to –

KRISTOL: Maybe that is, I guess, the counter argument to you. And this relates in terms of your book and Bob Putnam's and stuff, is you guys are either romanticizing or using as the benchmark a very unique 20, 30, 40 year period when, as you just said, there was this kind of mobility and one country and post-World War II. Maybe this is back to the past, or it's always been more this way. But I think that is not your argument.

MURRAY: No, but I'm sensitive to the vulnerability of people like me to romanticizing that kind of thing. There is a, my wife is, who comes also from Newton, Iowa as I do, the former home of the Maytag Company, she observes that my whole view of American capitalism has been deformed by the fact that I grew up in a small town with one of the companies which in the 1950s was very rare that was trying to make products that never broke down. That was unusual.

It was a company town which meant that any kid who had the goods to go to college would get a free ride from the Maytag Company. There was the lovely Maytag Park that everybody had access to. You know, it was this company yeah, but it was extremely good for the town. So I sort of thought well, there's American capitalism and American community and it works really well. Might be a little romanticism there.

#### **IV: *Human Differences* (1:03:00 – 1:14:03)**

KRISTOL: Your most recent book, *Of the People* –

MURRAY: [\*By the People\*](#). It's not a good title if people can't remember it. That's the problem.

KRISTOL: Well, I was close. If I Googled it, it would still show up. So say a word about that. I think you characterized it here as even more pessimistic. I am not sure that's quite true.

MURRAY: It was more systematically pessimistic. I will give you an example. Well, let me first state the thesis, and that is that the United States, the American project is essentially already dead in its original form. And I document that in the initial chapters through several observations that I had known about, but I hadn't taken seriously enough.

For example, I had always known that we departed from the original Constitution in terms of limited government, but I thought it was kind of a slippery slope and maybe if you got the right five or six people in the Supreme Court, you could slowly rebuild some of these limits on government. And so when I actually looked into Constitutional law, I came face to face to the degree to which in the 1930s in a handful of decisions the court said, "Now we're going to interpret the Constitution this way," and there's no going home. And it lifted all the bars, basically, on what the government could do.

Similarly, I was aware back in 1988 that the law was getting so complex that in many ways it was lawless from the point of view of an ordinary person who can't figure out why they are being prosecuted for this crime instead of that crime, or why they are having to pay a fine for something in their workplace that wasn't causing anybody any harm.

I didn't know the half of it. I didn't understand the extent to which the regulatory state is self-contained. It can make the regulations, it can enforce the regulations. It can then adjudicate whether people have been guilty of violating them. All without oversight of Congress except to the most general sort. And the degree to which these regulations are impacting – the use of impact is a verb, may be the first time I've ever done that on TV – which had a large impact on ordinary Americans going about their daily lives.

And also I had not realized the institutional sclerosis, to borrow the phrase from Mancur Olson, an economist we both I think probably have been instructed by. The degree of institutional sclerosis, which explains why we're never going to get a clean tax reform. We're never going to get clean health reform that does a lot of rational things that could be done to solve these problems. And the reason we're not going to get it is because the institutions are too tied up in the regulatory and lobbying knot that Mancur Olson identified.

So in all of these ways I was saying forget it, folks. The American project of people living their lives as they see fit as long as they don't bother anybody else, that's gone.

And then I tried to offer ways in which we can rebuild it. That's the optimistic side of the book. I think probably people correctly understood that my case for the pessimism was much stronger than my case for the optimism.

KRISTOL: I wish not to understand that, so I thought it slightly optimistic. But I won't quarrel with that.

Final couple of questions, you can answer one or both or neither, as you wish. Your own work, what comes next or what are you working on?

And secondly, more broadly, what do you expect to see in terms of social science, what should we be looking for that we will learn in the next two, five, ten years? Either social science or more broadly, since you're interested in the natural science side of social science, if I can put it that way. I know you have given that quite a bit of thought.

MURRAY: Well, both questions go to the same thing, because the book is actually where social science is headed. I guess I can go ahead and talk about the title of the book.

KRISTOL: That would be great.

MURRAY: This may be its public debut.

KRISTOL: That's huge. [Laughter]

MURRAY: The working title of the book is *Human Differences: Race, Gender, Class and Genes*.

KRISTOL: Well, at least it's not going to be controversial, so that's good.

MURRAY: I should say it's not going to be, the substance, is not going to be nearly as exciting as the title seems to indicate. Here is the thesis of the book, real quickly: That the social sciences in the United States and the humanities have become run by an orthodoxy in academia. Which says race is a social construct, gender is a social construct, class is decisively causal, it's called intersectionality now, I think. But social class, you know, that determines everything.

And my modest message in the book is first, race is partly a social construct. It's partly a biological construct. Gender is partly a social construct, sex is also a biological construct that has meaning. And that class is not nearly as determinative as people usually think it is. That's one message of it.

The second message is the differences that we are talking about, whether they involve gender or ethnic groups or whatever, are not scary. We are not going to rank groups of people from superior to inferior, whether it's by sex or whether it's by ethnicity. That we're complicated bundles of different strengths and weaknesses and they are usually small differences. So that's the second message.

But the third message is that the social sciences, if they don't get onboard with all of the new knowledge that is being accumulated in the natural sciences, they are going to be irrelevant.

And I will give you a concrete example is you go to social science journals now and you will have all sorts of analyses of the causes of crime. Well, we know a lot more about the genetics of criminality than we have known before. Not at the level of genes *for* criminality, but in terms of the genetic, the heritability of it and so forth. If you try to write something about causes of crime without bringing to bear what we also know about the causes of crime heritability, your analysis just isn't worth reading. And right now you can get away with that because the orthodoxy is so scared of biology.

That can only go on for so long because the rate at which we are learning about the genome and learning about how the brain works, it's so out of whack with what people assume. So at some point the

level of knowledge that's out there that is being ignored by the social scientists would no longer be ignorable. And there was going to have to be a major revolution within the social sciences, or else it is going to be irrelevant.

KRISTOL: This doesn't necessarily lead to *A Brave New World* situation where there are few scientists who understand how to program all the rest of us. I mean, it isn't incompatible –

MURRAY: No, that's a long way down the pike.

KRISTOL: This level of knowledge of the genome, of the human brain or whatever is consistent with sort of the Declaration, it is consistent with the belief in the moral equality and dignity of –

MURRAY: No, rest easy on that score. I am talking about something much more pedestrian. That social scientists, if we are doing our job right, are understanding how the world works better than we were before. If we're applied social scientists, we are thinking in terms of policies that are likely to work.

What we have ignored for so long is the role that human nature plays in all of that. And in part, we have wanted to treat human nature as being a blank slate. Steven Pinker wrote a very good book 15 years ago saying why that was stupid: to think of us as blank slates. But we have, in fact, not wanted to think in those terms.

For social scientists to be able to understand how the world works, we are going to have to take our proper place in the hierarchy of the sciences which goes like this. At the top is mathematics. Physics is built on the basis of mathematics, chemistry is built on the basis of physics. Biology is built on the basis of chemistry. And the social sciences should be built taking into account this complicated thing called the human being, understanding the realities about how human beings work.

That won't mean that the social scientists' insights are no longer important. We have things to say that science is not going to be able to inform. But we've got to integrate what is going on in the natural sciences, especially biology, with our work.

KRISTOL: And it's not happening.

MURRAY: There are a few brave people out there who are starting. And I don't think this revolution is going to take forever. I think things are happening so rapidly that by even 2025 and certainly by 2030 I can't imagine that the "race as a social construct, gender as a social construct" orthodoxy is still going to be running things.

There's one thing about academics which you can count on. The same people who say that IQ doesn't mean anything are absolutely obsessed with their own IQs relative to their colleagues. They really don't want to be seen as stupid. Above all else, they don't want to be seen as stupid. They do want to be seen as smart.

We are not very far from the time in which people who continue to say some of the silly things that social scientists say now are going to be seen by their colleagues as stupid. And you want to talk about incentives? That's an incentive that still works.

KRISTOL: That's great; that's an optimistic note to end on. Who says that you're becoming more pessimistic? Charles Murray, thanks so much for joining me today.

And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]