Conversations with Bill Kristol

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Taped May 10, 2019

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I: Free Speech on Campus (0:15 – 24:30)

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. And welcome to Harvey Mansfield, joining us once again. Thank you for taking the time to do this.

MANSFIELD: My pleasure, as always.

KRISTOL: That's nice of you. And I thought we would discuss higher education, which you've been involved in for your entire life. A professor of Government at Harvard since 1962. And so, we can talk about free speech, talk about liberal education, more generally. How fares higher education these days?

MANSFIELD: Yeah. We can do all those things.

KRISTOL: Good.

MANSFIELD: Perhaps the best lead-in would be an example of higher education recently when I was disinvited from Concordia University in Montreal. Concordia has a small liberal arts college within it that's devoted to great books, and I was invited to give their commencement address, and then later on disinvited. So I wrote an article about this in the *Wall Street Journal.*

One remarkable thing was the letter. First, I had a letter from a principal, as he's called, Mark Russell, to invite me. And then I had another letter, a second later from him, to disinvite me. So this was a sort of problem that he had, and he solved it in a way which I think is an example of the science of public administration.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. How – Here you invite someone and then you write a second letter to disinvite them. How do you handle this? It's sort of a hot potato.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: And according to the best science, what you should do is to be able to pass off this hot potato to somebody else with least loss of heat transfer to yourself.

KRISTOL: Ha!

MANSFIELD: And that's what he did. So he didn't accuse me of being revealed as a rascal who has inappropriate views, but he also didn't admit that he was – or apologize for what he was doing, which was a kind of insult. To come to the substance of the matter –

KRISTOL: But what had happened? Why were you disinvited?

MANSFIELD: What happened was that women, certain feminist women in the faculty, at the instance of alumni – or perhaps just with the support of alumni – decided that I didn't deserve to speak there, so I should be disinvited. And this was an act of justice and nothing remarkable about it. And so, Principal Russell said, "Sorry for the inconvenience." In this letter to me, that's all he said he was sorry for. It wasn't just an inconvenience, it was an insult, as I said.

There are two things, I think, – and I talked about them both – two issues that could be raised from what was done. First, the nature of feminism in higher education today, and also the question of free speech. And it turns out that those two may be related.

So first on the nature of feminism. Today's feminism is 20th century feminism dating from Simone de Beauvoir and it differs from 19th century feminism, the feminism of the suffragettes. Both of those movements wanted equality, equality for women.

But the first one, the suffragettes, stressed the particular virtues of women, admitting their relative physical weakness perhaps to men, but stressing the virtues of them: "women are more moral. If you give them the vote, they will improve our politics by purifying it from these drunkard husbands, and males who are corrupting our country." So their equality was really a kind of all-around equality, that women were superior in some respects and inferior in others. And taken together, they and men were, generally speaking, equal.

But no, in the 20th century, Simone de Beauvoir argued that the two sexes are identical almost, almost identical. She couldn't quite go the whole way. And that equality can only be achieved by being similar or the same as the other sex, the male sex.

So that meant that women were claiming not to be better than men, but to be more deserving because they've been underrepresented in important occupations, ones that receive recognition. Women now would have the same equal recognition as men. They'd always received less: "just your mother, your wife." Very fine. But it doesn't give you a door in an office with your name on it. So now there would be this all-around equality.

And this was – but it turns out when women go to work, they are more vulnerable than men. So, they're subject to sexual harassment. And all kinds of measures have to be taken about sexual harassment, which were not necessary when men dominated the workplace. Now men's domination had to be much more carefully mentored, or watched over, and measures taken against it.

And this exposed the kind of contradiction in present-day feminism between the equality of women – to mean women are equally strong as men – and the vulnerability of women that are not equally as strong as men, but they're subject to being pushed around, induced to misbehave and generally put upon.

It's, by the way, not an accusation which has nothing to it. The life of a woman is, in some ways, being constantly, at least under the threat of being put upon, pushed around by men who do this, oblivious to what they're doing for the most part, or nastily aware of it. So you can have either experience in it. And that is part of being a woman, to live that way. One has to understand this, I think, as part of the picture. But still it is a contradiction.

And it's true, they found things that I'd said. I'd made some disparaging remark about the capacity of women in science. "Look around at the top scientists," that kind of thing, "Are they women?" Maybe they

are beginning to be. We'll see. But still. That was on the record. And therefore, this is something that women needed to be kept safe from.

KRISTOL: But you weren't invited to speak about feminism and that wasn't your topic.

MANSFIELD: No. I wasn't going to talk about how lowly women are. No, that wasn't the subject. I was supposed to talk about great books. And, of course, great books contain many subversive notions.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Many different, diverse, opposing, contradictory views on various things. So there's nothing more diverse than a great books education. I'm just throwing that in.

KRISTOL: That's a good point though. Yes.

MANSFIELD: So there's a desire among the feminist women for women to have a safe space where they're not made uncomfortable, life is not disagreeable to them by having to face or confront contradictory views. And this had been very much the method of the success of 20th century feminism. It succeeded by what it called, "raising consciousness", and the way to raise consciousness was to make men aware of the way in which they mistreat women.

And one of the ways to do it – that has been done is through pronouns. You talk about a doctor and then you sort of unconsciously say, "he", as if it's a necessary thing that a doctor has to be a male. This is a way the feminists talk. So we must correct the use of pronouns, and that was done, through, sort of, lowly women copy-editors at University presses as part of the history of the success of feminism of the second half of the 20th century. And it was a success. They really have changed the face of American culture.

So, raising consciousness, but this meant that they didn't really argue in the way that the 19th century suffragettes did. "Why it is that women are equal?" That was just assumed to be the case. And "who were you to stand up against this obvious injustice and pay no attention to it?" That's terrible.

Now this also was accompanied by a view of free speech. So, let me back up and talk a little bit about free speech.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I think that's important because you could be feminist, and you could have an institution that embodies even modern feminist principles, and laws and procedures, but you could still speak there, right?

MANSFIELD: That's right.

KRISTOL: You weren't coming to change the promotion policies or sexual harassment policies or laws and procedures of universities in Canada. So you would have had no effect I'm going to say, on any of those things. So it is kind of astounding , it seems to me, that the next step of not wanting you to be there was taken.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. Yes, why did they do that? Well, they did that because of a misunderstanding or a new understanding, let's be neutral, of free speech. To understand free speech you have to first understand speech. I wrote a small article on this in *National Affairs* a couple of years ago on the value of free speech. When speech is different from the voice of an animal, whether it's a grunt of pleasure or a scream of fright, or growl of anger, all these can be voiced, but it doesn't become speech until you give a reason for it.

And it does seem to be a peculiarity of the human being that we can't get angry at something, especially some slight, for example, the slights that women have faced, without giving a reason. And when you give a reason, you go beyond expressing your private reaction to this slight and you give a reason which would apply not just to you, but to anyone like you, to someone like you. So in other words you

generalize. Speech is generalizing, it isn't just expressing your own private urge, but it's giving a *reason* why your audience should be interested and aware, and perhaps react as you did.

So speech is always directed at an audience. It isn't just for your own private psychological health. "I gotta get this off my chest." Well, we do talk that way, and there is a lot of speech, or so-called "speech", which is a kind of expression, and reactive, and doesn't have much reason to it. But that, I would say, is an imitation of what is really speech.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: What is really speech is an argument. Speech is always potentially a dialogue, that is somebody there you're addressing and you're trying to get that person to agree with you. Maybe he or she won't, but she'll answer with her own point of view. And that also is an argument that's erected back to you. Especially when you argue, you try to find a reason which would convince the person that you're addressing. So, not just simple defiance.

So, what's happened is that free speech has come to be understood as free expression. And this is probably the fault of the Supreme Court, which in a line of cases that's said that very same thing. So that often today, if people speak of "free expression", then free speech is a kind of subset of free expression, whereas it ought to be the other way around. You should speak of free speech and then free expression is a subsidiary, and not a very respectable one, of free speech.

And they're enemies, therefore, to free speech. Speech is sometimes used against reason, against argument. One [example] is the typical political tactic of personal characterization or attacking the character of your opponent, what Clinton called "the politics of personal destruction," which was directed against him. The politics of personal destruction. That is a kind of, truly, a distortion of speech and, hence, of free speech.

But then also there's a view, even a philosophic view, that there isn't any such thing as speech in the sense I've been describing. All speech is an expression of power, and if you have a lot of power, then you express it through your speech. You push people around by speaking harshly and dogmatically to them. And this has been very much the doctrine of Catharine MacKinnon, a prominent law school feminist, who I think has had a lot of effect on the thinking of universities. And she's said this about free speech. But she's also compared, she's the one who speaks of "safe spaces" for women, and she uses the word "violation", that you can "violate" a woman's safe space by saying something disagreeable to her in a way that makes one think that a speech that a woman doesn't like to hear is a kind of rape, or maybe insipient rape.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: So all speech is trickery, or either forceful speech or fraudulent speech. And nobody really ever makes a real argument because a real argument is an impossible thing. It isn't possible to generalize. You always have something of yourself in what you say.

So that's really a difficult and terrific question to take up. But now you begin to see how feminism is connected to the attack on free speech, that it isn't only from feminism that free speech is endangered, but it's endangered by something which covers or includes feminism. And that is that every speech has a point of view. Every speech is a self-expression or a point of view. And this is, I think, the argument of post-modernism. So feminism is an interesting, and perhaps even crucial, example of post-modernism.

Feminism is above all directed against feminine modesty. It isn't so much directed against men as it is against women, although other women, the women who believe in the feminine mystique, that's the title of Betty Friedan's famous book, *The Feminine Mystique,* that women are better than men, that they live on a platform and we're all devoted. We gallant males look up to women, "they are my better half," that kind of talk, which is a form of trickery, we're really trying to control them by praising them. But it's funny that the notion of safe space is a kind of resurrection or continuation of the idea of feminine modesty,

because then, in other words, modesty comes out in the form of defiant reluctance to hear anything that you don't like.

And also you could say male gallantry, too, reappears, in the male feminist, which is a funny character of our time. The male who takes the part of feminist women and wants universities to be flooded with women so that they can, at last, receive their just due. These are all Sir Lancelot types dressed in –

KRISTOL: Modern.

MANSFIELD: Yeah, in modern attire, jeans and t-shirts.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: But this is all, I think, a very important issue for the university. And I think we could look at what's going on at universities in general today as a reenactment, or as an enactment, of this feminist objection. And you saw this in the famous case of Nancy Hopkins and Larry Summers, Harvard President. Nancy Hopkins, MIT scientist, at a meeting when Larry Summers made the remark that there might be something in the nature of women that makes them less capable in science, and perhaps we should investigate that scientific point of view.

Seen through immediately by Nancy Hopkins, who said that's utterly disgusting and made her want to throw up. And she left the meeting because this was a very disagreeable thing for her to hear. And I think that's really a very important issue. There's something to be said for Nancy Hopkins, and I'll say it. And that is that science, the investigation, the continuing progress of science towards god-knows-what we'll discover is a little frightening for us human beings, and it puts pressure on us and it attacks our interests, seems to be altogether unaware of, oblivious to, uninterested in what's good for human beings. And it was a wonderful paradox that she, a woman scientist, was a woman rebelling against science. That's essentially the meaning of what she did.

So this I think is a general picture of what is today going on in the universities. The scientists and the humanists. The thing is that the humanists aren't as courageous as Nancy Hopkins. They're totally confused. They have no way of defending themselves. They know that they're not science, and yet, they don't know what that is, to be what it is, what there is, is there an "is" in non-science?

And therefore if it's not science, it's just second-rate. It's not real knowledge and therefore it deserves an inferior place in the present-day university.

II: Liberal Education (24:30 – 55:23)

KRISTOL: Let's come back to that in a minute because that's humanities and science, and gets to the questions of a liberal education which you've written about and spoken about.

But just on universities or the academy for a minute, I guess I am struck at the apparent failure to simply defend free speech, as a principle in its own right. They may not fully understand the grounds of it, as you've laid them out. It might be a more traditionally liberal kind of just, "everyone should have the right to free speech or free expression" even. And you can see that in a society and in politics there will be pressure on that because the majority or the more powerful groups might have an interest in suppressing it. But I guess it is striking to me that the academy doesn't even hold to that kind of simple principle that we can't start going down the road of suppressing speech. I thought they were supposed to be such dogmatic, sort of libertarians on that issue in the academy. Isn't that tenure, and academic freedom and all that?

MANSFIELD: Well it turns out that supporting free speech is more difficult than just accepting a principle, because free speech really only thrives when there's contested speech and speech that people disagree with. So if everybody has one opinion, then you have to be very courageous, or idiosyncratic or just a provocateur.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Or a kind of idiot to stand up against it. So free speech doesn't have respectable adherence. Now in our country it does have, we have two parties. Everybody knows that.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: And the two parties very much disagree and they argue with each other.

KRISTOL: So that provides a kind of basis.

MANSFIELD: Yeah, that's a better, that's a stronger basis for free speech than in universities when everybody says the same, are all liberals, effectually, and everybody says the same thing. So they're unable to distinguish between speech and expression. And if someone wants to use expression with a protest to stop somebody else from speaking, it looks as if that has the same right of free speech. So free speech works against itself in that way or doesn't know how to defend itself.

KRISTOL: But on John Stuart Mill type grounds one can still distinguish "free expression", let's just call it, that doesn't deny other people their freedom of expression, and free expression that does. And that's kind of the standard, I would say, intelligent, liberal defense of free speech these days in universities, the University of Chicago statement or whatever.

MANSFIELD: That's very good. And that's good.

KRISTOL: But you're saying they can't really, it's hard to hold that line without a kind of base just as a doctrinal matter, Mill doesn't work without kind of a –

MANSFIELD: Something behind Mill to explain, to justify free speech or to explain what it is. And that it isn't just a matter of listening to your – that your view is being disagreed with. It's more a matter of argument. Do you take the other side seriously? And you see this all the time in politics. There's nothing politicians don't do every day but argue with the other party. And they spend all their time thinking up, some of them are yes, tactical arguments, a lot of them are, maybe all of them are.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: But still behind it, underneath it, is the notion that speech is about argument and dialogue.

KRISTOL: Actual political politics and political contestation, in a funny way, provides more of a basis for defending free speech or makes it easier, practically, to defend free speech, than the ivory tower where there aren't these parties. One would think though at first blush it might easier to just accept the principle of free speech. Why is that so hard?

MANSFIELD: Yeah. It is.

KRISTOL: It is harder than you think.

MANSFIELD: It's harder than you think.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. Because of the importance of the point of view.

KRISTOL: I suppose if one believed that it would contribute to progress, and this is to get back to the sciences, there's not much, there's a little bit of suppression, I suppose, of dissident views of science too if they might lead to politically uncomfortable solutions; but at some point, especially in the nonhuman

sciences, I don't know that people are interested in suppressing different physics theories because you would need to find out which one is correct or more correct.

MANSFIELD: Exactly right. Yeah. So there's no basis for anybody's self-interest fighting expression. Science is not about proper names. It's about common nouns. Yeah. And so I like to remark the buildings at MIT have numbers, not names. They get away from the idea of human importance. Human importance is self-importance. It's trying to bend the world to your will. And no, science is based on facts. It just keeps on discovering new facts, and that makes a bit of a problem.

For example, in a university science course, say we have it at a liberal arts university, you want to teach science to non-scientists. This is part of a liberal education, and the two sides get to know each other. What kind of course do you teach in present-day science? Which means that it'll be obsolete in a short while. Or do you try to discover the essence of science and what best characterizes science? So at Harvard where I was, in 1949 as a freshman, I came, and they were just getting started with general education. And general education was a great program that was instituted by the president then, President Conant, and described and promoted in a book called *General Education in a Free Society* that came out in 1945 and made quite a splash, I think, in American higher education at the time.

And if you reread it, as I did a while ago, you cannot help but be impressed with the level of argumentation. It mainly deals with what I think is a main issue in universities today, the relationship between science and humanities. And said Conant, he was Harvard President, but he'd been head of the Manhattan Program that had discovered the atomic bomb during World War II, and he appreciated the argument that took place among scientists. It was, again, this Nancy Hopkins argument, whether science should be let to run its course.

And we should discover everything that we can discover. Or whether it should be controlled, guided by some principle. And then there were two principles – two competing principles. One was our national interest: win the war. And the other was the interest of humanity in not producing a weapon of, as we now say, "mass destruction," that could eventually or quickly kill off all of humanity. So, out of that argument, Conant decided that Harvard needed to be devoted in good part to the connection between scientists and non-scientists.

And that was why he wanted this program of general education, which would be liberal education. And I think that was [cross talk]. And as coming back to me as a freshman in 1949, I took a course which was taught by Conant called Natural Sciences IV, which was a kind of history of science course, which I considered different eras of science like Newtonian era, the Ptolemaic [phonetic] era, and so on. In order to get the essence of science, rather than to just learn what Physics was presently saying about the facts that it uncovers.

And, funny thing is, among the teachers in that course, was a man named Thomas Kuhn, who later on in 1962, published a famous book called *The Structure of Scientific Revolution,* in which he gave a kind of politicized version of science. He said "science is characterized by normal science." And normal science is the science of the present paradigm. Scientists don't individually search out facts for themselves, but they always think in terms of some paradigm, like the Copernican paradigm, say, or the Newtonian paradigm.

And everybody agrees with that until at a certain point someone comes up with a new paradigm. The only way the science progresses is through this new point of view. So you see how that's connected to post-modernism.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Science is a form of reason, which is a form of logic, and that is subordinate to politics, the power, the power that human beings have to control their lives and other people's lives through the way that we think. So that was I think quite a remarkable discovery. But now, of course, Thomas Kuhn was

not the inventor of this point of view. You could say post-modernism is the point of view of the point of view. Anyway, point of view means that there isn't any truth.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Everything is a point of view, and you can first find this, or best find this, actually, still best find it in the philosophy of Nietzsche. Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, especially in, say, the first part, the first chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche talks about the *perspectivic*, every view of anything has a perspective. Any time you look at the world there's always a horizon. A horizon is the limitation, a limitation which Nietzsche says is arbitrary, but which is necessary for you to control things. Otherwise everything would be chaotic.

So there has to be kind of limitation. And this limitation comes from you, that's your self-expression. It makes you think the way that you do. And so this is, I think, this is which is beyond post-modernism. Post-modernism, the point of view. And then everybody has a point of view. Now, what I just said, is that true or is that just another point of view? It seems that even the post-modernism needs truth, at least from that kind of elementary point of refutation, you might say.

But everything has a point of view, and I think that it infects our notion of free speech. And it also infects many other things, other characteristics of the modern university. And one is identity, that identity is a point of view, which is an attempt to impose yourself on others, so it's directed at others but it doesn't argue with them, but it treats the university as an arena of power struggle. It's either a battleground, it's still being fought out, or it's a zone of triumph. One side has won and declares its identity –

We got the same problem of points of view, you could say "diversity". Diversity is having different identities. Then is that one true thing to have diversity? Or is the whole idea of diversity just another identity? And then you can go on to that.

And another consequence that goes together with identity is choice. At Harvard, and I think it's the same at other universities too, students' choice is the thing you most want to preserve and promote. So the number of requirements is reduced to a bare minimum. And nothing is to be imposed. If something bad happens, what do you do? You take a survey in order to find out what the students choose.

So there isn't anything true that you can appeal to. So hence choice – democratic choice, and choice is kind of a funny thing too. Once you choose something, then you're sort of committed to it. Like you choose to get married to a certain person. Then you can't go back on that, or you can, you can get divorced, but then that doesn't put you back where you were before you chose.

So choosing consists in sort of limiting yourself with choices, all of which are arbitrary, could have gone the other way. So you end up with the life that you chose, and yet, it feels totally imposed on you. Nothing intrinsically satisfying. And this choice is also connected to the doctrine of self-esteem. If you choose, the thing you esteem the most is the chooser, the faculty of choosing, which you try to exercise. It's what defines you, and yet you must exercise it as little as possible because of this difficulty of once you choose something, you lose your options. I want to maintain my options so I don't choose and I sit there in uninformed disinterest and ignorance.

And what is connected to self-esteem? Affirmative action, one. And two, grade inflation. Affirmative Action: we must raise the self-esteem of the identities that we want to promote, so we give them preferences, give them a break. They're included. You have to be on the official list of those to be included in order to be included. If you're not on that list, then you're excluded because every inclusion is an exclusion of someone else. Those people can get resentful. Be careful. Watch out. They might vote for Trump. Things like that.

KRISTOL: Right. Or launch lawsuits if they're Asian.

MANSFIELD: And then grade inflation. That's another one, which is no student should face a disgrace or self-abasement of a C. So the C has totally disappeared from American college life. I think that's a bit of an exaggeration, but one of those exaggerations that is really true. That whole sense of average has been lost in our society, even though it's a fact that almost entirely one half of Americans are below average intelligence.

KRISTOL: Right, which people sort of know and they make jokes about it, but then they don't want to really think too hard about it.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. That's right. Yeah. They're not going to do anything about it.

KRISTOL: You say, I think in the essay, you wrote on the Harvard General Education curriculum that relativism becomes debilitating in the sense that everything is just a kind of slightly random arbitrary choice and nothing is taken seriously. A certain kind of relativism, or Nietzschean perspectivism, or whatever, could encourage a real confrontation of different ways of life and ways of thought, and as you say the great books are very diverse. So in a way it's healthy, one could argue, to have this kind of debate as opposed to a kind of simple-minded progressivism, let's say, where Plato's overtaken by Locke who's overtaken by Hume – it's more interesting to actually have them confront each other. Why does it go in this debilitating direction instead of…?

MANSFIELD: Yes. You would think it could. Yeah. There is this word I've recently come across called "intersectionality".

KRISTOL: So what's the problem? Is the problem with higher education today? Is it the conformity or the diversity? Somehow it's both at once?

MANSFIELD: Yeah. Somehow those are identical things.

KRISTOL: That's a little crazy.

MANSFIELD: It is. It is crazy. Yeah.

KRISTOL: I think the diversity is less real than the conformity somehow in a Tocquevillian way.

MANSFIELD: Exactly. The diversity isn't real diversity because it just looks for people of the same opinion who have a different sex or color, so that's all it is. So that diversity is in, you might say, less important matters. And the conformity, in what really carries import and that's opinion. People guide their lives with opinions. Opinions are well or ill-formed reasons, so we're back to reason and speech.

KRISTOL: Yeah, back to reason yeah.

And do you think, you came to Harvard, it's hard to believe, 70 years ago and you've been teaching there 55+ years, as we speak, in May 2019. Is it worse? Has it gotten worse? Is it better? Is it just a constant problem of democracy? Is it a constant problem of modernity? Is it a constant problem of life?

MANSFIELD: It is a constant problem of modernity, and therefore of life. Right, it is. But it's gotten worse.

KRISTOL: Is that right, genuinely, you think?

MANSFIELD: Notably, genuinely worse. The big change was in the late '60s when post-modernism, the attack on the university as such, became respectable.

KRISTOL: And worse on the free speech front and on the liberal education front?

MANSFIELD: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Because one could imagine them going in different directions. In fact, I think they did for a little while, maybe, I would argue. You can imagine a vigorous world of free expression that doesn't have much in the way of political education, but is a lot of opinions. Or you can imagine the opposite, a lot of political education without much freedom of expression, I suppose. Or maybe you can't, I don't know.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. I don't know. In the late '60s, it wasn't that way. In a way it was, you could say, a good situation for free speech because there were conservatives.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Right. Wasn't the movement called "The free speech movement" at Berkley?

MANSFIELD: Yeah. The new left was born in the late '60s, but also the conservative movement, really, as a self-defined movement in opposition. You had something to do with that as a student at Harvard at the time, I remember.

KRISTOL: No, I was just a kid. I would watch it. Yeah. One had the sense of more of a confrontation of ideas.

MANSFIELD: On the one hand it was wearing, it's wearing to be angry all the time. But on the other hand some important issues were raised.

But what happened was gradual replacement of the conservatives or of the old liberals. The old liberals and the New Deal liberals, the anti-communist Cold War liberals, people like my father, people like all of my professors at Harvard at that time, were gradually replaced by feminists and progressives, both of them post-modern, and increasingly so.

And also increasing obliviousness to the problem. I've got a lot of quantitative, scientific colleagues and they're also just like the people at MIT: on the one hand, totally devoted to science, and on the other hand, totally devoted to feminism. And Nancy Hopkins points out, her case points out that those two are opposed.

KRISTOL: And do you think, this is my instinct, but maybe I'm wrong, since in the real world one has to pick one's fights, I suppose, and in a way adopt some half-true or two-thirds true principle. And you can't find everything at once, then it would be really important to fight the free speech fight first, or more fundamental. That's the greater danger somehow. Even if you have to have a certain kind of relativistic approach to it and defense of it, that you know, let everyone speak, I think, is an easier argument to make than a fancier liberal education argument at this point.

MANSFIELD: I suppose that's true.

KRISTOL: I suppose. But you're saying that they're related, you can't really sustain the free speech.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. They are related, but what you said is also true, that you can't change everything at once, and so you need to adopt a temporary or provisional argument.

KRISTOL: I guess I'll give an instance. I'm curious to know what your reaction to this is. The article you wrote, it was in the context of the question of the core curriculum at Harvard, and so forth. And I always thought I was in principle in favor of a core curriculum. I mean, I am, I suppose. I think some things are more worth studying than others, and the 18, 19, 20-year-olds should be exposed to Shakespeare, and The Founding, and so forth. And you can't just let everyone choose their courses because then you really could have totally random kind of education, or not real education for young people.

Having said that, I was on the board of a public university in Virginia, the Board of Visitors. And there was actually a fight about whether they should have a core curriculum. They didn't have a core curriculum. They had been more of a vocational, technical school, and they were moving up in the world and so the humanities people mostly there wanted to have a core curriculum because there were an awful lot of

students who were taking computer science, or education, or nursing to get their degrees and get jobs, and weren't taking the courses in sociology, or English, or history or political science.

And I remember I was initially friendly to this, and as the debate went on, I became unfriendly to it because I thought, "These people are taking real courses, hard-working, they're not getting a broad liberal education, they're not reading Plato", and so forth. But the substance of what was going to be in the core struck me as the worst of all worlds: sort of not helpful to them, and many of these people are spending hard-earned money to get a degree which would help you in life, it wouldn't be helpful, and it would just be kind of silly, liberal stuff or current academic fashions and so forth.

MANSFIELD: Not really great books, but affirmative action books.

KRISTOL: Yeah. So that point. Let's not have a core.

MANSFIELD: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Let everyone teach what they want, let everyone take what they want, and at least some of the students might find something good, and the other ones will get their professional accreditation and move on with life.

MANSFIELD: They'll try to subject Shakespeare to a race class and gender analysis.

KRISTOL: If they even bother to read Shakespeare.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. But that's the thing, that's the good thing about such a course because the reading works against the teaching.

KRISTOL: Right. So that cuts the other way, that just getting Shakespeare in front of intelligent young people is a plus even if it's taught in a stupid way.

MANSFIELD: Yes. Right.

KRISTOL: I guess that cuts the other way, maybe in favor of requiring some Shakespeare.

MANSFIELD: Right.

KRISTOL: I guess I'm practically more libertarian these days on educational matters than I would be in theory. Just because – don't you think? We need to preserve the freedom of professors to teach and students to study?

MANSFIELD: Yeah. I think that's probably right. Yeah. Then maybe the crucial thing is more conservative professors. The hiring. And one should make the biggest objection to lack of diversity of opinion in the universities.

KRISTOL: And maybe more diversity of making sure at least the books get published, and that we have conversations like this, and students can learn outside the university. I really wondered a lot about that, whether, how much one can count on the universities to educate, as opposed to – Maybe one never really could that much, right, in a funny way? Most of human history, people haven't gotten most of their education from universities.

MANSFIELD: From universities, yeah. A great medieval invention.

KRISTOL: Hobbes complains about them.

MANSFIELD: Let's not spoilt it.

KRISTOL: You want to preserve the universities, all thing being equal.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. You're right, it's good to have competitors to the university. But it's where my heart is.

KRISTOL: And I suppose it is where for the foreseeable future, most young men and women are going to go through, and be somewhat shaped and somewhat educated, so kind of important.

Final thoughts? Are you somewhat hopeful because at the end of the day nature kind of – these great books sort of reassert themselves?

MANSFIELD: Yes.

KRISTOL: Or are you somewhat depressed?

MANSFIELD: I'm somewhat hopeful.

KRISTOL: Okay, that's good to hear.

MANSFIELD: I just am that way. I think it's a kind of human duty to take the happy view of things, not oblivious to the things that oppose our well-being. But yes, because if we don't have it, if we make a complete mess of the universities, it's our fault. We didn't have to do it.

KRISTOL: Right. Yeah, that is remarkable, right? It's not like the barbarian hoards destroying all the books in the libraries. It's a totally self-inflicted wound. Okay, well, you've left me somewhat cheered up, not entirely cheered up, I would like to say, but yeah, sort of a healthy – my father used to say that he was a cheerful pessimist. You're more of a doubting optimist, or something like that. Skeptical optimist maybe.

MANSFIELD: Alright.

KRISTOL: Good. But you've left us with some hope, and look on these works that you've worked on all your life, and translated some of which, and written about, and your reflections on the universities, all of those are there. That's the good news. Unless we literally enter book burning and true Orwellian suppression of everything that's been said and written, I think there's hope that people can find these and can get an education.

MANSFIELD: Yes. Let's end with that.

KRISTOL: Yes, okay. Harvey Mansfield, thank you for joining me today, and thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]