

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

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**I: Machiavelli's Effectual Truth (00:15 – 43:13)**

KRISTOL: I'm Bill Kristol, welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very glad to be joined again by Harvey Mansfield, the Harvard professor, the original converser or conversationalist or whatever the proper term is here. But it's great to have you back and great to be discussing Machiavelli which you've worked on for a long time, translated several of the major works.

MANSFIELD: Right.

KRISTOL: And author of –

MANSFIELD: Pleasure to be here, thank you.

KRISTOL: Good, well good to have you. And author of an earlier volume from 1996, *Machiavelli's Virtue*. Now you have a forthcoming volume of articles, *Machiavelli's Effectual Truth*, at least that's what you're intending to call it.

MANSFIELD: That's my title yeah.

KRISTOL: It's your title right. Of which there's a new introduction which we'll focus on perhaps today which is really terrific and important, I think. And then a very long essay which could be a short book on Machiavelli and Montesquieu, maybe we can touch on that too.

MANSFIELD: We can touch on that yeah.

KRISTOL: That would be great. So, it's actually great to have you back first of all and –

MANSFIELD: Thanks.

KRISTOL: Great to have you here, our leading interpreter of Machiavelli — one of the two great modern interpreters of Machiavelli. It's okay to put Leo Strauss in the same, elevate him to the same category as you?

MANSFIELD: No that's a great elevation for me.

KRISTOL: Okay well. So talk about –

MANSFIELD: An underserved elevation. Let me say a word for Leo Strauss —

KRISTOL: Okay sure.

MANSFIELD: — and his *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, his famous game changing book of 1958. He changed his opinion about Machiavelli as well, I think it's well known. In an earlier book in the late '30s on the political philosophy of Hobbes he said that Hobbes was the founder of modernity. In this book, he changed his mind and said no it wasn't Hobbes, it was Machiavelli. He had not paid sufficient attention to the forces that prevented Machiavelli from being as explicit as Hobbes was. That was the reason that he gave for his "mistake," as he said.

In his Hobbes book, he claimed, he made an argument so powerful and read by most of the scholars on Hobbes and believed by some of them that Hobbes is more of a moralist than a scientist. What is really fundamental about him was the numerailty that he brought of equal rights and materialism. His science was an instrument of that morality, rather than the other way around.

That could lead you to Machiavelli because Machiavelli also makes his announcement of his change in chapter 15 of *The Prince*, departing from the orders of others he says in regard to morality. What others focused on was the good, what is a good, or how good are you. And the trouble with doing that is that you're relying on something that's imaginary and not something that's the effectual truth. If you rely on the good, you're wishing that other people will be good back to you. But if this doesn't happen then you are nonplussed and at a loss, and you'll come to ruin. He actually says that, uses that lovely phrase, "come to ruin."

So he too begins modernity, he says, departing from the orders of others, that is the orders of the ancients and the medieval philosophers who were derivative of the ancients in regard to morality. That's how modernity begins. It's not a change in science, strictly or it's not Galileo, it's not the earth moving instead of sitting still as it seems to.

KRISTOL: The effectual truth we should talk about for a minute, so you stress that, of course; you put it in the title. I have one other question, so I take it Strauss probably also didn't quite appreciate in the '30s what he came to emphasize, that Machiavelli was fully a philosopher, had thought all these things through. He wasn't just an extremely intelligent, hard-headed political realist. And that must have been key also to Strauss's — At least everyone knew Hobbes and Descartes they were all —

MANSFIELD: But he began to see that pretty quickly —

KRISTOL: Once he — with his —

MANSFIELD: — yes I think so. Yes, it is a question. What I'm talking about is Machiavelli is the founder of modernity and that being said Machiavelli was a philosopher.

KRISTOL: Right, those two go together.

MANSFIELD: That a philosopher can be a founder.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: That modernity is something which was founded according to somebody's plan and not just a result of accidental causes that came together as most historians I think would say.

KRISTOL: That's for me what was so exciting about that long introduction which is you've said it before, or argued it before, and Strauss of course does. But I think you really developed what it means to have been the founder of modernity and a philosophic founder of modernity more perhaps than you have before and more. Elaborate on that more, so that's —

MANSFIELD: Yes I go a little bit further than Strauss in this regard and that's risky. But he was –

KRISTOL: But in the direction he pointed towards.

MANSFIELD: I know but he was so strong, had such a powerful mind himself that he didn't feel that he had to say everything. And he generously left many items in his book, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, to be explored and elaborated and perhaps gotten wrong by later followers of his, as I am.

KRISTOL: Good. So –

MANSFIELD: All right, so that's what I'm doing in this, in what comes. Now let's look again at the effectual truth.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: This is a phrase in the first paragraph of chapter 15 of *The Prince*. It says the effectual truth instead of the imagination of a thing. You look at this phrase “effectual truth” seems to have no fore runner. I haven't been able to find it anywhere in any philosopher, that particular phrase. The particular word “effectual” was invented apparently by Machiavelli. One of the Italian scholars who worked on the text of *The Prince*, just happens to mention this rather amazing fact. That this word which we use quite frequently came into the English language soon after Machiavelli and actually got into the King James Bible if you can believe that.

KRISTOL: Machiavelli would have liked that.

MANSFIELD: He would have loved that. Which came out in 1611, 100 years later. Effectual is — This is the only use of it in the whole Italian renaissance.

KRISTOL: So the phrase in Italian is *verità*?

MANSFIELD: *Verità effettuale*.

KRISTOL: Used only by Machiavelli apparently.

MANSFIELD: Only by Machiavelli and only this once.

KRISTOL: That's really amazing.

MANSFIELD: Not in a letter, and not in the rest of *The Prince*, he doesn't ever explain it.

KRISTOL: Used in this extremely famous and important chapter of *The Prince*, in a central way you might say.

MANSFIELD: Yeah, right. He never used it again. A word to the wise is sufficient is a good example of that. A single word like that used just this once caused attention to itself, if you're the type of person that doesn't need to be told things twice.

KRISTOL: So the –

MANSFIELD: So what is it?

KRISTOL: The solitary use of it makes it more important, not less important, in your argument.

MANSFIELD: Yes exactly, that's what I'm suggesting. So, what I'm interested in now is in the philosophical meaning of the “effectual truth.” The moral meaning is sort of to deprecate or to downplay

or to satirize, even, the moral attitude. As when you tell someone, "I love you." What does it really mean? The effectual truth is, "I want something from you."

So, that's another thing, what is the result that comes out of your high sounding words? So the focus is on the result. And you could see how this connects to modern science: its abandonment of formal cause and final cause, as Aristotle had it, to the efficient cause, the cause that makes or produces and the cause that has an effect.

So other aspects of modern science: its materialism, its the use of the extreme case, its abandonment of normal. There isn't any normal. What we call normal is just what is more frequent than some other event, and there's no norm, as in Aristotle's ethics, you might say. So aspects like that which we talked about earlier.

KRISTOL: Yeah we talked in an earlier on conversation.

MANSFIELD: Earlier conversation, I perhaps don't need to go over that.

KRISTOL: No. But it undermines the morality of intention right?

MANSFIELD: Yeah that's right.

KRISTOL: Because, its consequences matter. You don't get credit for wishing.

MANSFIELD: You don't get credit for intention, much less good will.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: That's pretty foolish to go round spouting. Or actually believing in people's good will.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: So then –

KRISTOL: So why is this so fundamental? And why is it the foundation of modernity, I guess?

MANSFIELD: Right. So then he — Well let's have a look for what it means for a philosopher to run a country. Because, this can explain a little bit more the sense of founding that a philosopher undertakes. That I found just recently in chapter 11 of *The Prince* and I'll read it to you from someone's translation which, it's on chapter –

KRISTOL: This is needless to say from the authoritative, definitive, unsurpassed, Mansfield translation, right?

MANSFIELD: All right. [Laughter] Chapter 11 is called, "Of Ecclesiastical Principalities." He starts off with this, very sarcastic description of ecclesiastical principalities, that is countries that are run by the church, that is pretty much all countries in his time. He said, "These alone have states and do not defend them. They have subjects and do not govern them. And the states, though undefended, are not taken from them. The subjects, though ungoverned, do not care, and they neither think of becoming estranged from such princes, nor can they." So and then it just occurred to me that this is a beautiful description of how a philosopher rules a society. How America, say, is ruled by John Locke and Montesquieu, perhaps with some others too. But nobody knows that.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Nobody would think of complaining or being estranged from John Locke. It's fundamentally there, everywhere but it's not understood or appreciated. There we all are –

KRISTOL: It doesn't feel like you can or should rebel against it I guess.

MANSFIELD: No you don't even know what there is to rebel against.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Or what you're thinking about. So, that's what he set out to achieve, I think.

And it became — that took him to the question of succession, which is very important for Machiavelli's prince. In *The Prince* he seems to indicate that the only way, really, for a prince to have his regime be succeeded after he dies is to transform it into a kind of republic, because if he's succeeded by another prince, then that prince will do his best to efface any memory of the preceding prince as a kind of rival or threat to him.

So, the only way is to become a founder of a republic, like George Washington is our first president. The others can be president but they're not the first, so he's still ahead of us all. On the other hand, he's not a tyrant and we can revere him as the first of his kind.

So, that's a suggestion that a philosopher, even if he wants to be by himself — because for Machiavelli every prince, indeed every human being, if you understand your situation, needs to consider himself and to make himself what he called *uno solo*, one alone, in which you do not depend on other people but they depend on you. So, that's what you try to achieve.

Now Machiavelli as philosopher can't quite do that fully because he's going to die and others will come. How is he going to control and make possible a continuing conspiracy to change the world so as to cure it from imaginary thinking, imaginary moral thinking? So that's his problem, you might say, a succession problem. He wrote a play called *The Mandragola*.

KRISTOL: Discussed in one chapter of the —

MANSFIELD: Discussed in one chapter.

KRISTOL: — forthcoming book. Well there's an article, it's already published.

MANSFIELD: That's right.

KRISTOL: Yeah excellent. Yeah.

MANSFIELD: In *Mandragola* the leading theme is a young man, Callimaco, who falls in love with a beautiful woman who's married and who is moral, a very Christian woman. So, his problem, since he wants to conquer her and possess her, is how to do this; and he sets up a conspiracy. So, it's a play about a conspiracy. But that conspiracy is made possible by the fact that the wife's husband, the stupidest man in the play, is also a kind of doctor of letters, refers to a philosopher, the only one in the play. I think it's kind of a representation of Machiavelli himself, who pretends to be dumber than he is. He wants a son. So it's a play which is a conspiracy about getting a son. And what they do is use the young man Callimaco as a kind of stud for his wife, who commits adultery, but has this good result therefrom.

KRISTOL: But the young man thinks he's overcoming the foolish old man?

MANSFIELD: That's right. But actually his way is being facilitated.

KRISTOL: He's used by the —

MANSFIELD: He's being used yeah by [inaudible] yeah. So, that's the way Machiavelli gets control of you. He makes you think that you control yourself and you're imitating him by doing what he does, but

you're actually a kind of instrument in this grand campaign or conspiracy to change the way human beings everywhere live and what they think.

This is why conspiracy is such an important feature of his thought. The many scholars underestimate conspiracy. But just take outward resemblance or fact that in both *The Prince* and *The Discourses on Livy*, his two main works, the chapter on conspiracy is the longest chapter: chapter 19 in *The Prince* and book three chapter six in the *Discourses*. So look it up. There you see that he gives you directions on how to carry one out, how to carry out such a conspiracy. So, that's what he's attempting with his succession.

KRISTOL: How much of this has he learned from Christianity? I mean he's of course overturning a certain –

MANSFIELD: Yeah that's right. It's a project, the Italian word is *impresa* which sounds like the word “project” which is *vorstellen* in German; and in English an “enterprise” is another translation for *impresa*, or “campaign.” “Campaign” in the military sense, and enterprise in the sense of sort of free enterprise that we use today. Something that you do on your own, use your freedom to do, which brings you satisfaction, or even glory, honor plus money, material gain and perhaps prestige over or even governance over other human beings. So, that's an important word, *la mia impresa*, “my enterprise” is a phrase he uses.

KRISTOL: About his own –

MANSFIELD: About himself.

KRISTOL: Himself yeah that's striking.

MANSFIELD: Yeah it is, right. So after him, there's going to be other philosophers. There will be followers and readers. So he compares himself to the head of an army, but it's an army of spiritual warriors, see, not of actual dressed-up military. Who else did that? He speaks of how unarmed prophets always fail, so you need to have an army. And he gives an example of a failed prophet, Savonarola who, sure enough, was killed and burned at the stake before Machiavelli's eyes in downtown Florence in 1498.

But he says, an unarmed prophet always comes to grief. That ain't true. When you read Machiavelli you have to prepare yourself for the fact, the sad fact, that he lies. He has a letter in which he says he lies, and he's got so used to it that he hardly knows when he's telling the truth and when he's lying. He adds that he's an expert, he's a doctor in the art of lying.

So there's an obvious unarmed prophet who didn't come to grief, but conquered the world — in a sense pretty much that Machiavelli means for himself — and that's Jesus Christ. A quite a pretty obviously candidate. He did it through a church. So Machiavelli is going to co-opt the Christian church, imitate it, but turn it over. Instead of putting God at the top, put a man, a human being at the top. He's going to maintain the Christian Trinity. But he refocuses it as an army with three branches which he discusses in the *Discourses*. I talked about this in my earlier book on the *Discourses*, called *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: The three branches of the modern army: infantry, artillery and cavalry.

KRISTOL: Yeah, those of us who suggest –

MANSFIELD: Yeah they represent these — So the infantry represents stubbornness, *ostinazione*, obstinacy. And that's the spirit of Machiavelli's honor, he gets the orneriness of resistance, the intractability of human beings.

Artillery, that means you can hit somebody from a distance. That's like propaganda, or the bringing of the message to human beings, the word to human beings.

And then cavalry: man on a horse is up there where I'm not, I'm just walking. So that's authority, somebody who's above you and looks down upon you.

So, you've got — those are the three parts that are father, rather, Holy Ghost, Son and Father. So he's taken the Trinity and turned it upside down; putting them Spirit / Holy Ghost first, and the father as authority comes last. So, that's what he's doing in general to Christianity is turning it upside down. And he's going to use this, especially the central one artillery, that is propaganda. Strauss had spoken a couple of times of Christian propaganda as a model for Machiavelli in his book *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. So, this is how —

KRISTOL: This is in the service of humanity though not —

MANSFIELD: Yeah, and this army also has captains. That comes out in Book Three of the *Discourses*. The captains of Machiavelli. These are captains of his, but also they are captains over others. So those, one can imagine are the successor philosophers. There's going to be, and there were, modern philosophers who are Machiavellian in their spirit. They follow out the notion of effectual truth. Descartes, Hobbes, Locke.

KRISTOL: Bacon.

MANSFIELD: Bacon, Spinoza, Leibniz, there's quite a list.

KRISTOL: Knowingly —

MANSFIELD: Knowingly yes.

KRISTOL: — carry out Machiavelli's project you believe.

MANSFIELD: That I'm leaving to others.

KRISTOL: Bacon seems to be very —

MANSFIELD: Yeah, Bacon is pretty obvious, because he refers actually to one of the doctors of Italy, i.e. old Nick. So that's much clearer than the others who stopped mentioning him. Hobbes never mentions him, Locke of course never mentions him. But you could probably find indications of it, and I leave this urgent message to future scholars or present ones —

KRISTOL: Yeah since not mentioning him —

MANSFIELD: — to work on this a little bit more.

KRISTOL: Yeah, not mentioning him cuts both ways, right? You might not realize, quite, your indebtedness, or you might wish not to advertise the fact that you're following this notorious character?

MANSFIELD: Yes of course yeah, right. So Machiavelli in attacking morality knew that he wasn't going to succeed in changing morality or getting people to abandon it. Because moral people have kind of the same necessity as the rest of us. They are weak they have to believe that people are good because otherwise they are in trouble.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: If people are not good, they're weak and that's it for them. So they have to believe in a God that will protect them or save them or at least provide consolation in the next world if not in this world. So

that's their necessity. So human beings are going to be moral as long as human beings exist as they are, capable of being not good. There will be people who want to identify that and oppose it. So, Machiavelli would not therefore be surprised to hear that his name is used for something bad or is used for any dishonorable act as you can call it Machiavellian and that's –

KRISTOL: He sort of gives permission doesn't he ahead of time for it to –

MANSFIELD: That's right. So that's what he's done for us. And I think he's joking, he's laughing to himself at the bad name that he's going to get, his form of glory.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. Because glory is the only high good or highest good that human beings can achieve. The highest glory is the glory that occurs after you die. So, you get to appreciate that future people will admire your name. And if not, do what you want. But he doesn't care about having people admire, most people, admire his name. All he wants are the people, the very few who understand, philosophers who will come and who will carry on this *impresa* to its success.

I don't know whether that takes us now to Montesquieu?

KRISTOL: Yeah so just one word before we get to it. So he expects us, or these subsequent philosophers, I mean given that he understands morality is not going away, that just seems very important. The “new modes and orders” don't transform human nature.

MANSFIELD: That's right.

KRISTOL: They accept human nature and the necessities.

MANSFIELD: Yes, you see, now that's one place where Hobbes tried to change his view. Hobbes does try to produce a new morality, a morality of rights and duties which are connected to rights. A duty to be accommodating and to be honest in a kind of low way. So, honesty comes back in.

KRISTOL: But that's in accord with Machiavelli's notion that people who want to think they're being moral and therefore would want some form of moral justification.

MANSFIELD: Right.

KRISTOL: If it's a Hobbesian one instead of a Christian one, that's you know?

MANSFIELD: Right. It does away with the eminence of morality that was so prominent in the ancients and also in the Christians, the nobility of it.

KRISTOL: Makes it more equal.

MANSFIELD: Yeah it's the morality of all, equal. So not very demanding.

KRISTOL: So the Hobbes / Locke modifications is in the spirit of –

MANSFIELD: In the spirit of Machiavelli, but it is a change and it shows.

KRISTOL: Important.

MANSFIELD: Now Machiavelli wouldn't be surprised by the need to change because he himself describes it in a chapter in the *Discourses* Book 2, Chapter 33 where he speaks of Fabius the Roman general. Fabius was sent on an expedition with explicit instructions from the Senate. But when he arrived there, he found a region called the Ciminian forest which was utterly unknown and unexpected and not in



accord with the instructions that he had received. So he abandoned his instructions and sent back his excuse to the Senate, which agreed that his departure was acceptable, even admirable, in the circumstances faced with a new problem.

So, this is Machiavelli claiming the ancients whom he departs from would have excused him, because he faced a new danger that they didn't, namely a monotheistic religion, or a world of three monotheistic religions, that totally changed the politic aspects of society, made the polis really impossible and introduced kind of universalism to human life that hadn't had before.

He also had the twin defects of Christianity: namely, that it makes people weak and that it makes them cruel. Weak, they don't want to fight, they just want to turn the other cheek. Cruel, they get so enthusiastic and zealous for the religion that they try to impose it on others, as in the crusades. So, he knows that these future philosophers will possibly face a new Ciminian Forest, something like, say, the problems of modern science.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Which Machiavelli didn't face, or wasn't imminent in any way for him. So therefore, he so to speak gives his permission to future philosophers to change what he's done. But see that's the question, how can he be sure that his principles will continue after he dies? We see that in fact it's very hard to get rid of modernity once you have it.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: So once you begin with this elaborating, and working, spending your life and your energy on the effectual truth, and the benefits that come there from that. The military, once a military becomes technological you're on a kind of moving belt that never stops. The technology gets worse, gets more and more complicated and you have to keep up, otherwise you'll be defeated and you'll lose your freedom. Also, besides the military, there's medicine.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I was thinking about that. Once that starts, once the relief of man's estate and the human condition, we're all still bodies and once the relief of that becomes possible who's going to turn away from that really?

MANSFIELD: Yeah it's true. Today, everybody is questioning science. Climate change, why is it changing? Because of science, because of technology, because of the internal combustion engine. Yet science tells us about this, and now science has produced this vaccine to remedy –. So how can we give up those benefits? We live now to 90 years old, see.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's good. I suppose Machiavelli might have expected that the criticisms, though deep and interesting, of modern science and the modern scientific view, would all be ineffectual. Even the critics themselves would understand that this is a reflection upon something and the deepening of our understanding of something, but who really calls for genuine abandonment of medicine of progress.

MANSFIELD: There isn't even a name for it. That's right. The name for it is postmodern. See they can't get away from it.

KRISTOL: I guess so. Or nostalgia or something.

MANSFIELD: You need a new name.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: A new start. Machiavelli points out the importance of Christianity and the way in which it rules by referring to dates. There are 26 dates in the *Discourses*, so that's twice 13. There are plenty of 13s. Thirteen seems to be Machiavelli's number. All the dates in the *Discourses* are in Machiavelli's

lifetime. How do we count our years now? From the birth of Christ. They've tried to change this a little. It's BCE instead of BC, instead of Before Christ, and CE doesn't stand for Christian Era it stands for Common Era.

KRISTOL: Common Era, yeah. This was a concession for secularist and Jews and so forth yeah.

MANSFIELD: That's just a cover up of the real truth that we count all our years from the birth of Christ.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Machiavelli suggests that possibly you could start from his birthday.

KRISTOL: I see, since all the dates are in his lifetime.

MANSFIELD: Yeah all the dates are in his life.

KRISTOL: But that hasn't quite happened, for all the perspective —

MANSFIELD: His birthday is May 3rd 1469.

KRISTOL: But the French Revolution tried that in the —

MANSFIELD: Exactly.

KRISTOL: I mean, of course, people ridicule it now, but there was something behind that notion, right?

MANSFIELD: Yeah.

KRISTOL: If you're really in a new start for mankind and rejecting the past. Machiavelli maybe thought you couldn't fully reject the past, as much as the French Revolution.

MANSFIELD: Yeah probably right.

KRISTOL: You couldn't just destroy the existing.

MANSFIELD: Yeah somehow the Senate, i.e. the ancient philosophers, remain.

KRISTOL: Therefore —

MANSFIELD: Yeah. So but there still remains a kind of dilemma for philosophy after Machiavelli. And that is, as a philosopher you have to rethink something. Machiavelli gives this definition, it is good always to reason about things, it's always good. There's nothing you shouldn't reason about. So, that means you have to reason about Machiavelli.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: You have to rethink Machiavelli. Was this a good thing? Should we make it permanent? Or was modernity just an experiment? And we would go back to something else. We would go back to the ancients.

KRISTOL: Or to a third thing, I suppose, or conceivably.

MANSFIELD: Or something new.

KRISTOL: Something new yeah, that would be the posthuman versus —

MANSFIELD: Right. So in a way, say, Machiavelli is a kind of tyrant over future philosophers, because he forces them to begin from the same thing he begins from. But in a way also, he's just a prince over a republic because being philosophers they get to rethink; so in a way they're rebellious subjects, at least potentially, not people who quietly follow him.

KRISTOL: Possibly, in Machiavelli's world, presumably freedom of thought would be maybe more achievable, or more accessible, or less difficult than in the world he faced. So he's not being hostile to philosophy, one might say, in creating this new world that respects reason and invites people to reason.

MANSFIELD: He does.

KRISTOL: Or doesn't burn you at the stake.

MANSFIELD: That connects him to the Enlightenment.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: Which is what Strauss does in his book, he says the enlightenment really begins with Machiavelli, it's not just an 18th century event, that's just when the *philosophes* come out in public and try to claim authority on the basis of their philosophy. Machiavelli doesn't think that's possible.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: People cannot be made into, most people cannot be made into — which means states, princes — cannot be made into philosophers.

KRISTOL: People can't fundamentally change, maybe.

MANSFIELD: Yeah they can't fundamentally change. They can't fundamentally be enlightened either it means.

KRISTOL: Yes, they should have read Machiavelli more in the Enlightenment and less — they shouldn't have just begun with Hobbes and Descartes or whatever.

MANSFIELD: Everybody who wants to think today should read Machiavelli much more than they do. Philosophy departments should start teaching him in their —

KRISTOL: That would be something.

MANSFIELD: — fundamental courses. But —

## **II: Montesquieu's Machiavellianism (43:13 – 1:11:54)**

KRISTOL: Now, Montesquieu, whom you devoted such a long chapter to, really could be a short book.

MANSFIELD: I do have a long chapter on.

KRISTOL: No but, he was philosopher, sort of an Enlightenment philosopher who appreciates Machiavelli.

MANSFIELD: I've talked about him too in a previous conversation so we have to watch out —

KRISTOL: That's okay.

MANSFIELD: — not to be too repetitious for eager listeners.

KRISTOL: Yeah, but you hadn't really written up Montesquieu at that point and –

MANSFIELD: No I hadn't.

KRISTOL: — you seem to have made new discoveries here.

MANSFIELD: Yeah there's a new discovery to be reported, that's right. See Montesquieu perhaps wanted to be the end of the line of Machiavellian philosophers. And he tried to change — he accepted that fundamental principle of effectual truth. And I remember I spoke before of that chapter in book 29 chapter 19 and the way he treats so disrespectfully all these five philosophers.

KRISTOL: That's right.

MANSFIELD: Bringing out the passions which inspired them not the reasons. So, that's very bad. But he doesn't like the *uno solo* conclusion of Machiavelli. He thinks that's tyranny and it needs to be corrected, and can be corrected. So what he corrects it with is our friend that we live with, liberal constitutionalism and the separation of powers.

MANSFIELD: Right.

KRISTOL: Power gets separated into powers.

MANSFIELD: Power gets separated.

KRISTOL: That's so important yeah.

MANSFIELD: Also, the security of the individual. "Social security" that's a phrase from Montesquieu. It's all a matter of opinion really. It's not just that you need to be made secure, you need to be made to *feel* you're secure. It's your opinion. You mustn't frighten people. Hobbes used government too punitively; he tried to make fear the basis of equality. No, you mustn't do that. You must, for one thing separate the judiciary, which is the most fearful branch because it's what actually punishes people, sends you to jail, possibly even kills you, if it believes in capital punishment.

Montesquieu also had a certain appreciation for the ancients, which appears only in Machiavelli's in these sort of hidden images of communication, let's call that esoteric communication. But Montesquieu tries to bring the ancients out into public. The principle of virtue, which is it's shown in the republic of virtue, the ancient republic, the first 10 books of Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* are on the ancient republic. That's really his treatment of Plato and Aristotle, what they do. Again the virtual truth of their philosophy is in the kind of regimes that they advised and seemed to recommend, like Sparta, which is I think, a considerable modification, not to say a degeneration of those philosophers. But still there's some connection there.

Yeah, and he too seems to indicate that philosophy is something that is always open. Still open. He wants to show that he is not simply rejecting the ancients, as happened with most modern philosophers after Machiavelli and before Montesquieu. They simply they laughed at them; Hobbes especially mocked the scholastic philosophers, he didn't even talk about them actually. Well Aristotle too, he criticized Aristotle pretty fundamentally.

KRISTOL: "Aristotility."

MANSFIELD: Just single criticisms he doesn't really meet their arguments.

KRISTOL: So Montesquieu, though he seems to project ultimately ancient virtue as a standard, he takes it seriously enough that one could then be –

MANSFIELD: Yeah he praised it very highly.

KRISTOL: — invited to study it too right? Which I think is a very different spirit, yeah, from Hobbes or even Locke.

MANSFIELD: It is.

KRISTOL: Or modern science where it's all disapproved or out of date.

MANSFIELD: Yeah it is. There is something we've lost, or a price that we've paid.

KRISTOL: So Montesquieu tries to bring that back a little bit.

MANSFIELD: He does. There's a certain nobility, generosity in his justice, which I think is a specialty of his.

KRISTOL: And he corrects Machiavelli according to his lights, and also the Enlightenment, but that also could be a criticism in the spirit of his criticism of Machiavelli right?

MANSFIELD: It is.

KRISTOL: That you can't have this full-bore enlightenment, a Voltairean Enlightenment or something.

MANSFIELD: That's right yeah.

KRISTOL: People aren't —

MANSFIELD: So he recommends the kind of rational religion, or reasoned religion, and commerce. Commerce will calm people down. Just as we hope to do with communist China: you engage them. You give all commercial states reasons for not hating, or at least not fighting, each other: it ruins your trade.

KRISTOL: But also make sure they're not ahead of us technologically in important military ways.

MANSFIELD: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Combine that.

MANSFIELD: Yeah.

KRISTOL: As you say.

MANSFIELD: Yeah that's perhaps not fully taken care of.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Yeah.

KRISTOL: So that's so interesting about Montesquieu, who is too little studied maybe also, and not taken philosophically enough, wouldn't you say?

MANSFIELD: Yes, once again yes.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: Because it's a little bit hidden, you'll have to dig for it, and you have to get yourself in the mood and with the equipment and dig.

KRISTOL: And this sprawling book, well, the different books.

MANSFIELD: Well, one thing therefore you need to do is pay a little bit of attention to numbers and the way in which philosophers indicate their attention through numbers. So, esoteric writing has I think two aspects, the use of numbers to indicated a problem, and then the use of images to elaborate a problem. Figurative images, you tell stories. You try to make the King of France, well just to use this example, it might be understood to be Thomas Aquinas, or even the god of scholastic theology, kind of constitutional god with limited powers, as if limited by nature. This is the way Machiavelli speaks of the King of France. And the others; I found it in Boccaccio too.

KRISTOL: This isn't unique.

MANSFIELD: France stands for the Sorbonne. The French are the philosophers of the Sorbonne, the scholastic philosophers. So that's an example of the figurative use of esoteric communication. The figurative use is more difficult and people will have different views, of whether this makes sense, whether it's reasonable to make that kind of — It's a guess, it really is a guess. It's a speculation; better to say that than guess. It's i.e. a guess which has reason behind it, but not reason enough to close the deal and make it certain.

That's what a person does when he gives a hint. When you give a hint it's something that you can deny, it's deniable. "I didn't mean that wink I gave you, it was just a blink in my eye; I had something – it's not, You're just interpreting that." So, you're asking — And are you the kind of person who can take a hint? So you have to be that kind of person. If you insist on complete proof of everything, you'll have a very restricted life, and as a scholar a very restricted mind.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: So, let me give you an example of the numerical —

KRISTOL: Let me ask one thing first on the hints, I mean it's reassuring I assume though to find the same hint, as it were, or the same image maybe, the same use of someone metaphorically for someone else, in more than one thinker, right?

MANSFIELD: Yes.

KRISTOL: I mean that would sort of reassure one that they saw each other's hints.

MANSFIELD: That's right.

KRISTOL: And therefore you're not making this up out whole cloth if other people use political disputes to mask or to convey or to suggest philosophic disputes, and if Alexander stands for Aristotle, or whatever.

MANSFIELD: That's right.

KRISTOL: You can't be too formulaic about it, and yeah and France — And you say other thinkers seemed to have had this, this isn't I mean —

MANSFIELD: Yes, do have the same practice.

KRISTOL: So they're all, they're sort of signaling each other across the ages a little bit.

MANSFIELD: They are signaling, exactly across —Virtual signaling —

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: — across the centuries.

KRISTOL: Philosophy signaling, yeah that's good.

MANSFIELD: Yeah philosophers. Yeah that's what they do.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: But the numbers you see, they don't have to be interpreted so much. I mean that can tell you for sure that something is up. Like those 26 dates in the *Discourses*. Like the 142 chapters of the *Discourses* that happened to be — this is what Strauss points out — that same number of books as in Livy's *History*, that's not an accident.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Yet the meaning of it is not clear. So, it's a puzzle.

KRISTOL: What's knowable, presumably, is that it's not an accident, or it seems virtually, almost certainly knowable. The meaning obviously that's a puzzle.

MANSFIELD: So that's why the numbers help.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: They tell you that there's something there to be understood that you're perhaps not quite getting. So, what I saw in Montesquieu, the continuation chapters as I call them, Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* has 31 books, and those are divided into six parts. He speaks at the beginning of "the design of the author" and "the design of the work," so two designs. He tells you that the design of the work matters. The official design you can see: 6 parts, 31 books, and each book has a certain number of chapters. One book has just one chapter, that's the 27th. The 26th book, you can imagine, guess, might be quite a bit about Machiavelli. But it has only 25 chapters. So, the 27th book would have been the 26th chapter in the 26<sup>th</sup> book. But Montesquieu says, [gestures to the side]

KRISTOL: Separates some stuff.

MANSFIELD: Yes, separate it. Make it a little bit more difficult. You can he's sort of playing with us. But the number of chapters, that people don't count because there doesn't seem to be any reason to do so, you're not required to do so. But my friend Diana Schaub did it and she found 605 chapters. She noticed one of those things –

KRISTOL: It's just adding up the chapters of the books.

MANSFIELD: All the chapters from all the books.

KRISTOL: This is not some mystical thing right.

MANSFIELD: Yeah it's not [laughter].

KRISTOL: This is not like her own chaptering, you know.

MANSFIELD: It's slightly laborious, and it's easy to make mistakes.

KRISTOL: Yeah that's a problem right.

MANSFIELD: It's a test of your accounting skills, your arithmetical abilities. But why would you do it? But it comes to 605. Then there are these continuation chapters. This is an obvious puzzle that Montesquieu

has chapters, most of the chapters have subjects, but now and again you come across a chapter which says "continuation of the same subject," "*continuation du même sujet*. Why?

KRISTOL: And it's not only when the previous chapters are too long or something like that.

MANSFIELD: No, right?

KRISTOL: Because sometimes they're quite short, as I recall. Then there's a continuation.

MANSFIELD: Right, a very short chapter still has a continuation.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

MANSFIELD: So what's going on here? But there's a number two. There is a number of continuation chapters, which Diana Schaub counted as well, and that's 55. Then now let's look at those two numbers, 605 and 55, 605 is 5 times 11 times 11. And 55 is 11th of 605. So that's 550, chapters that have a subject and 605 chapters in all. So the chapters that have a subject is a different number from all the chapters. That's 550 is 5 times 10 times 11.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: So, there's something going on with 10 and 11 which I would just suggest, and people can follow this up, have something to do with Christianity. And five, five stands for the senses we have. The five senses: You touch. Then four senses on the face that are taste, hearing, smell, and sight. So this is –

KRISTOL: And there were famously five senses way back then.

MANSFIELD: Way back when.

KRISTOL: We're not inventing this.

MANSFIELD: This is not a new discovery or a new designation.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: We have five sense and then some people speak of a sixth sense.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: Yeah. So, everyone knows there are five senses, but not everyone could list them as I just did.

KRISTOL: That's impressive. [Laughter]

MANSFIELD: There you go.

KRISTOL: Yeah that was Donald Trump like and its ability to come and do that.

MANSFIELD: So in other words philosophy has to do with Christianity, and it has to do with empirical senses. And this is the beginning. And I think more generally, or in addition, each of the continuation chapters has something of what the philosopher is commenting on to other philosophers especially.

KRISTOL: So, they are chapters in a way, you think?

MANSFIELD: Special chapters. Yes, special chapters that do comment on the preceding chapter. But from a philosopher's point of view.



KRISTOL: Take it further?

MANSFIELD: Yeah. So two of them are about ostracism, the 33rd and the 44th see he likes these — Sticks with the 11s.

KRISTOL: Yeah that's good.

MANSFIELD: Have to do with ostracism, which was a practice in the ancient polis of exiling or getting rid of anyone who was outstanding in such a way as to pose a danger to the rest of the city. Aristotle discusses this at some length, said the justice of it and the injustice, it seems unjust to kick out your best citizen —

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: — as a threat. Why not let him take over the government? Well, that's a risk especially to democracy, he might be a tyrant, as good as he is. Or just because he is so good, he'll govern and not listen to us. So, there's a kind of democratic justice in ostracism, and also an injustice in getting rid of, not paying attention to the best citizen, who might be the philosopher.

So Montesquieu says ostracism is actually glory, it isn't just something you shouldn't do. Or if you're the best citizen, you should take glory in being ostracized because it's a noble sacrifice for the good of the city and in general of mankind. Not to try to rule as a philosopher. So, he backs off from —

Machiavelli spoke of the glory of governing and Montesquieu has the glory of *not* governing. That difference isn't quite so clear because Machiavelli also claimed to be allowing the glory to the princes that he instructs, in a way they get the political glory, which he modestly refuses in his own name, at least so far as most people understand him.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: So this is Montesquieu speaking of the glory of a philosopher. Then last point, the 55th continuation chapter is the *last* chapter in the book. So the book ends not with a subject but with a continuation of the subject. That has to do with feudalism. Because the last two books of *The Spirit of the Laws* are about feudal right, and the origin of it, and the Frankish Kings in France. But I think at the end of the book Montesquieu indicates it's very complicated and it's very difficult to understand.

By the way David Hume wrote Montesquieu a letter in which he says, “Can you tell me what you are saying in the last chapter of *The Spirit of the Laws* because I don't understand it?” Montesquieu wrote a very polite letter in reply, *not* answering the question.

So, I think he understands the situation of philosophers versus the rest of mankind differently from Machiavelli. It shouldn't be either an army or a church, but it should be feudal. As if a philosopher has his own followers, and there are plural, many, feudal lords, philosophers with their followers. And the duty of the follower is to come to the defense of a lord when he calls upon you.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: But otherwise it's a way of sharing rule, and many philosophers rather than just one. In his book, Montesquieu refers to many, many philosophers. In the footnotes, I didn't count them, though I know somebody who has.

KRISTOL: Oh good.

MANSFIELD: But he wants to induce democratic peoples, or free republics, or monarchies, he wants to release them from the subjection to a single philosopher. He doesn't want to take over that task himself.

There is one thing he did though, he never mentions John Locke in his book. That's one philosopher he doesn't mention, the one who's closest to him. The one who also is the founder of liberal constitutionalism, and who also referred to the constitution of England as the model regime for free peoples.

But it seems that Montesquieu, who treats the constitution of England twice in *The Spirit of the Laws*, wanted it to be less formally understood than according to Locke's principles. You have to look at the passions and the parties that arise in a free country. It isn't enough simply to refer to three branches of government, you have to look at how they operate.

KRISTOL: An in reality.

MANSFIELD: In reality. So I think his treatment of the English constitution is done in such a way as to take over, hijack it, from Locke.

KRISTOL: From Locke. So we end up with some of both I think maybe in America.

MANSFIELD: Yeah we do.

KRISTOL: The Bill of Rights which is Locke-ian, one might say in spirit.

MANSFIELD: So we have a state of nature. That's in Locke, that's really pretty much –

KRISTOL: Not in Montesquieu yeah.

MANSFIELD: He refers to it at the beginning of the his book, but he sort of, he kicks it out of his liberal constitution.

KRISTOL: So, that's interesting. So he thinks the Montesquieuan attitude towards liberal constitutionalism might be a little healthier than a Locke-ian one? Or at least it has to co-exist with one, I suppose.

MANSFIELD: Right. Instead of people being afraid in the state of nature, or acquisitive, they're timid. That's what he says, they would be.

KRISTOL: Insecure, yeah.

MANSFIELD: They're interested in security.

KRISTOL: Security yeah.

MANSFIELD: The state of nature is the state of insecurity. So, let's not talk about that.

KRISTOL: But he does get, though he doesn't care as much as Machiavelli perhaps to have glory alone, he is "the justly celebrated Montesquieu" in *The Federalist*. And he was extremely well known at that time as a founder but not *the* founder, perhaps, or an expositor of constitutional –

MANSFIELD: That's good.

KRISTOL: — government and separation of powers and so forth.

MANSFIELD: And the security is the security of the individual. So there's this democratic aspect, which we lack of course.

KRISTOL: It is the continuation thing, is that in previous works that one thinks of, I don't know.

MANSFIELD: That's a question –

KRISTOL: You need to go — Someone watching needs to go look that up.

MANSFIELD: Yes all right.

KRISTOL: It doesn't occur to me off hand that Hobbes or others have chapter titles like that I don't know. But I don't know enough of these works.

MANSFIELD: Yeah but maybe there are many obviously examples. There could be.

KRISTOL: Yeah. When we discussed this last night, briefly, you explained this. And I looked up, it occurred to me and this has occurred to you, of course, since you know Tocqueville better than I do – IN this excellent translation of Tocqueville, here, the doctor. So he uses once “continuation” —

MANSFIELD: Yes.

KRISTOL: Somewhat mysteriously, when you think about it for a second, quite bizarrely, right at the end of *Democracy in America* chapter seven of part four, volume two, “Continuation of the preceding chapters.” He seems to have been able to give every chapter before this a title, often a quite punchy title.

MANSFIELD: Suddenly he loses his imagination there.

KRISTOL: Yeah and then chapter eight, the final, is General Overview of the Subject. When you do look at those two, which therefore he really sets apart you might say, it feels that there are more personal and also somewhat more philosophic I would say than –

MANSFIELD: Yeah a good deal more philosophic.

KRISTOL: — what goes before.

MANSFIELD: He steps into the office of God. He tries to understand both democracy and aristocracy.

KRISTOL: Right.

MANSFIELD: As God does, which most humans don't. We lesser beings are either democratic or aristocratic and we don't know how to combine them or to appreciate both. Of course Tocqueville was a great student and admirer of –

KRISTOL: Montesquieu.

MANSFIELD: — his fellow Frenchman, Montesquieu.

KRISTOL: So we will have to come back –

MANSFIELD: Fellow aristocrat.

KRISTOL: Yeah, maybe we will discuss that particular continuation chapter. I was just look at it briefly and it is full of material.

MANSFIELD: Well I –

KRISTOL: Yes that very high ending with yes, one doesn't — “One can't have the perspective of God, it's almost impious to try.” But then he sort of gives it to you in a way.

MANSFIELD: That's right.

KRISTOL: Whereas previously he separated “this is aristocracy” and “this is democracy” and you can't look at both at once as it were, so yeah.

MANSFIELD: Right.

KRISTOL: Maybe we should discuss chapter seven or —

MANSFIELD: That would be a “continuation” in our conversation.

KRISTOL: Yes, okay good. That's a good note to end on, yeah we will continue this conversation. Harvey thank you very much for this really fascinating discussion of Machiavelli but of modernity really.

MANSFIELD: Thanks

KRISTOL: And really what it means because —Those of us, who vaguely are Straussians of one kind or another, and others too now talk of — well, everyone talks of modernity — but we talk of Machiavelli as the founder of modernity. But I think you've really, both in what you've written, and I think hopefully in this conversation, for people helped explain what that means. The magnitude, the amazingness of it really.

MANSFIELD: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Anyway thank you for taking the time today. And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]