

### Conversations with Bill Kristol

**Guest:** Harvey Mansfield

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KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome back to Conversations. I'm very pleased to be joined again today by Professor Harvey Mansfield of Harvard. We've had 21 excellent conversations with him and this will be the 22nd. But one topic we've somewhat skipped over, I'd say, in these conversations is a topic that Professor Mansfield has written on and spoken on an awful lot and very importantly and intelligently of course, which is liberalism and particularly the origins of liberalism and Hobbes and Locke. The most recent conversation was on Machiavelli and Montesquieu, but there are these thinkers who are in between those two.

Professor Mansfield has been, I think our friend Peter Berkowitz quoted you, Harvey, having once summarized your recommendation for the present, as "Locke in the short term and Aristotle in the long term." I also vaguely remember a version of it as that you said you thought Aristotle had more of the truth and Locke was more relevant or something to our current situation.

So we've talked about Aristotle a fair amount, and I'm sure we will some today too. But anyway, welcome. Thank you for joining me again and explaining and I suppose defending somewhat liberalism. I think you wrote a book called *The Spirit of Liberalism*, which I highly recommend to everyone, which amazingly came out 45 years ago, in which you say you were a friend of liberalism who intends to defend liberalism. So you can do it again 45 years later.

MANSFIELD: All right. Very good, thank you. Because liberalism does seem to be under special attack or renewed attack from illiberalism today, especially on the right. But let me say about Aristotle and Locke. Yeah, I think, it's better to say that Aristotle has more truth and Locke has more relevance. But on the other hand, perhaps I can show that both of them continue to be relevant and in their separate ways, perhaps Aristotle much more, have a significant relationship to the truth.

But starting from the illiberalism of today, and especially on the right, in America, the "common good conservatism," which we're hearing about, people, most of them Catholics, they want to return to Thomas Aquinas. But Thomas Aquinas, when you look at him, speaks of The Philosopher and it isn't himself, it's Aristotle. So let's go directly to Aristotle and see whether this Aristotle is going to force us to give up on liberalism.

Now, there are two kinds of liberalism that I need to make clear right at the beginning, and that is one is specific and the other is generic. The specific is the liberals that we know today versus conservatism, versus conservatives. And they believe in inclusiveness, in compassion, and they like big government when it serves those goals. As opposed to conservatism, which is, I'll go ahead and say "some people are better than others", so not much in favor of inclusiveness, or at least inclusiveness is not the big problem. The big problem is that the better people need to be somehow recognized and rewarded for the unequal contribution that they make to others. And since we live in a democratic age, conservatism, to the degree that they recommend virtue or people who are better than others, are in an embarrassment. And they get out of it by looking for virtues that are within ordinary reach. And perhaps the main one they think of is earning. So it's better to earn your living than to live on somebody else, especially on the

government. That would be a quick statement of the difference between specific liberals and conservatives.

But there's also a general or generic liberalism, and that's the liberalism of rights, which I think is quite generally believed today, at least in the free world, to the extent that remains. And this liberalism of rights begins in the 17th century and is best represented by Locke and his forbearer, Hobbes. And this is illustrated in the fact that the issue of abortion today is a battle between the right to life and the right to choose. Both of those are rights, so then that's our language of politics today. And that's the generic liberalism that I'm distinguishing from the specific, which includes conservatives.

Now, the common good conservatives think that they are always losing to the left and they want to change the game, if you could put it that way. They think, especially with reference to the culture, you might say the culture issues, as opposed to the economic issues, they think that they are gradually, sometimes significantly, losing one battle after another to the point where the country is headed to perdition. And an example would be same-sex marriage and the way in which that progressive policy went over so quickly with so little opposition and with so much general acceptance. So the common good conservatives take that as an example of the way in which liberalism is no longer adequate because it isn't the balance between liberals and conservatives that seems to be promised, but always losing.

The common good conservatives also don't like neo-conservatives, whom they say want democracy everywhere. So they're a little bit under embarrassment at present with [the] wonderful defense of the Ukrainians against invasion from Russia. And this is a problem for the common good conservatives because here are people who are liberals who are fighting for liberalism and for democracy and that make a spirited defense that appeals to most everyone, including the Democrats, and perhaps one could say the Democrats even more than the Republicans. But still, embarrassed as they may be by Ukraine, these common good conservatives don't want to abandon their attack on the generic liberalism that dates from the 17th century. So that's the kind of situation today.

Now, let's go back, let's start by looking at the common good as it is in Aristotle. He doesn't present the common good as one thing, as the common good conservatives seem to suppose, no. There's two common goods or two ways of looking at the common goods. So maybe there is one thing, but it has two appearances, or two ways of looking at it. Here, I want to put it in plug for my late wife's book, Delba Winthrop's book called *Aristotle: Democracy and Political Science*, because what I say now mostly comes from that book. Aristotle gives two definitions of the common good, which are very close to each other in the Greek. Instead of saying good, he speaks of benefit, the common benefit. And uses one phrase which means common benefit, with common, the adjective, defining benefit. But another phrase which puts common in the dative so that it's a benefit in common, benefit in common. And these are different.

The common benefit is what each and every individual has, and which we all have therefore in common, like susceptibility to a common cold. And these things almost all have to do with the body, the ways in which we all have bodies that subject us to problems with difficulties, and of course most generally, mortality. And that make us all, or at least give the basis for making us think all in the same way about the common good. Those are based on the body.

And then the other, the benefit in common means a community good, a good which is not individual but is, or arises from its appeal to people generally, or some people. And this has to do more with the soul. And an example would be a musician. And he, let's say in the history of jazz, Louis Armstrong, the best jazz trumpeter, and he gives a benefit to the community where he plays and is known. But it's a benefit which is distributed unequally because he has it the most. He's the best listener to the best player. There are others who follow him and are impressed by it, other trumpet players, say, and they are influenced by him, but they are not on his level. And then there's other layers, there are people who just listen and can't play. So they appreciate it, they're glad that he's here. And still others who don't listen because they don't care for jazz, but they're pleased to have Louis Armstrong and they call an airport after him in New Orleans and he's a great American. So there are, in other words, levels of appreciation from the best on down. And these are things which have to do mostly with the soul or with the accomplishments of the mind and of activities which require mind.

So that gives you two ways of looking at the common good and therefore two parties. And one would be democratic in which we are all looking at each other as equals. And the other would be oligarchic or aristocratic, in which we're not thinking of ourselves as equals, but unequals, in these layers or strata that radiate from the best example.

In this way, each of these can be made universal. One way of universality is equality, and the other way is through inequality. So the great philosophers, the great novelists, the great musicians, those are universal gifts, common benefit to humanity.

And then there's a philosophic version of each of these two parties, democracy and oligarchy. And the philosophy of equality based on the body would be materialism, because it emphasizes what is bodily about you and which gives you community with other people or commonness with other people on that basis. And if you carry out the logic of materialism, all things could be considered bodily and that's for their matter. So materialism would be the worked out philosophy of a political position of democracy. All is bodily equality, the whole universe is equal in its being equally body or matter of some kind. And that's the way modern science looks at, modern physics looks at the universe. It's interesting that there's an alliance between democracies as something political and science as something universal, based on what is matter.

But then on the other side that is best and with strata or layers of best, you have spiritualism or idealism, any association in which the essence of it is the best example of it. So the nature of a thing can be understood as its matter and also in its essence, that is when it is at its most complete and perfect. So equality versus inequality.

So when we come to Aristotle and Locke, you might think that Aristotle would choose the spiritual or idealistic common good, but he doesn't do that. He doesn't simply choose the soulful aspect of politics. You need both. The materialism of the body means that everyone can be understood as a slave: you're not free because you're essentially defined by the matter that you have. But this bodily equality that we have can also be used to justify freedom and to inspire the defense of one's body. And that's what the Ukrainians are doing, they're free in this way.

So you're a slave, say in the sense that you're mainly concerned with your body and your self-preservation, but you're also free because, as part of your self-preservation, you're fighting, you're defending yourself and defending yourself is more active and less slavish, and indeed not slavish, you might say, self-defense makes you free. So that seems to be a quality of the soul, that you defend yourself.

So the body is not so bad, since not so bodily. On the other hand, the superiority of the soul, well, consistent with the superiority in your mind, of your reason over your passions. Your passion are feelings that you have arising from the fact that you have a body. So you're afraid, fear, that's a passion. How to control it, that's a virtue, see.

But reason does have to concede something to the fact that we have passions arising from our body. We all have bodies, and that means that we all have fear, and that means that we can't simply dismiss our fears, we have to control them. So virtue is not simply, or indeed, not mainly concerned with intelligence. That's just one kind of virtue, moral virtue for Aristotle. Intellectual virtue is the reasoning about reasonable things. But moral virtue, which is the ordinary virtue, what most people have, or would like to have, or ought to have, is the control over the lower passions of our nature. That means you have to pay attention to them.

So Aristotle, yes, puts the soul over the body, and therefore the best over the average or the universally equal. And therefore you could say that the ancients are represented or stand for the land of virtue. They stand for man at his best.

Liberalism then comes in, as a rejection of the land of virtue, doesn't want to live there, on the basis of rights. And rights have a certain character, which gives liberalism a definite basic structure.

KRISTOL: Can I just two questions or one comment? I like the Louis Armstrong point very much, but of course, as you suggest, I mean his excellence is recognized in an egalitarian democracy, so that somehow means that democracies can have some appreciation of excellence. It's not named after a random person picked out of the phone book. And the airport's only named that, I don't actually know the history of it, but I assume after the Civil Rights revolution, which is based on equal rights. So the opposition of equality and excellence isn't quite as absolute as one might— and this is your point about Aristotle too, that yeah, they —

MANSFIELD: Souls are not abstract, they're in bodies.

KRISTOL: And if you liberate more people, so to speak, to have opportunities, there's some more chances for excellence, also more chances for the opposite. I mean, you just said that these moderns we're about to get to, they reject the ancients, the classics' land of virtue. Or do they reject — this now sets up, I think your discussion — reject the way in which the land of virtue is instantiated in practice, which isn't so virtuous? I mean, you could say, well, this is a practical matter, that land of virtue either never existed or certainly wasn't so obvious at different times.

MANSFIELD: Well, [inaudible], at least the best of them are the the earliest, and the earliest ones, Machiavelli and Hobbes, I think believed that virtue inevitably degenerates into tyranny, the tyranny of the best. So that —

KRISTOL: Or those who claim to be best.

MANSFIELD: That's right.

KRISTOL: Or not even best but just conspired or something.

MANSFIELD: That's right, representing the best.

All right, so we can look at then this basic structure of liberalism. Now virtue, you see, is connected to rule. Ruling means to manage or govern according to a principle, which is both the beginning and the end of the regime or government that you're talking about. So ruling means making people virtuous as you understand virtue to be. And the ancient philosophers here differed greatly from the ancients themselves, the Greeks. We get into the habit of speaking of “the Greeks” when we really mean Plato and Aristotle, but Plato and Aristotle were very critical of the Greeks. In general, the Greeks lived by courage and manliness to a much greater extent than is reasonable. And so you could say that Plato's republic and Aristotle politics are two treatises devoted to a critique of courage or manliness, or the rule of it in the regimes in which they lived and which they saw in their time. So rule goes with virtue.

And so liberalism begins with this critique of virtue because it goes with rule. So the rule of the best is in effect the rule of the Church; of priests who claim to have the word of God and who rule you, without seeming to, but in the name of God. And they rule you in such a way as to make you believe that God's commands precede, prevail over human necessities. So the things which you find necessary to do in order to live, in order to preserve yourself and to thrive and to flourish are often denied you by this form of indirect tyranny, which is the Church.

And it isn't just the church, but it's the doctrine of the Church as well. And so Machiavelli, who was the first philosopher in the Renaissance to criticize Christianity openly, it was not only that the Church was corrupt, corrupt Christianity, but that it was Christian, and that it was Christian doctrinally. Doctrinally, the Church made you believe that the glory of the world is subordinate to or much worse, much lower than the glory of God. And that kept human beings fearful and ignorant and unwilling to stand for and pursue their own honor.

That was a critique that liberalism begins from, the religious question. And people forget that today. They think that liberalism is a matter of republicanism, or a matter of inequality, or of economics. But the religious question preceded our concern with what is today called, or used to be called, the social question, the question of income inequality, that kind of question. It's a religious question. And that

makes liberalism look for an alternative to rule, a different way of organizing a regime.

And what they came up with, or what Thomas Hobbes came up with, was the notion of representation. And what representation does is to represent each individual, or adult individual, or male adult individual — these difficulties had to be argued out — in the rights that they have. So rights replace virtue. Rights are individual and inalienable, they can't be taken away from you. And because you have rights, the main right that you have is the right to consent, the right to consent to those who secure or regulate or limit your rights in order to make them viable.

This is the common benefit that Aristotle spoke of in the first of his two definitions of the common good, the common benefit of people equally, as each of us having bodies, so that the fundamental right is equal and it's self-preservation, it's your life. And the business of government is to secure that fundamental right, the right of rights. And the right to set up that government and to have an equal say in it, consent, is the right which underlies all the other rights, like free speech or private property and so on.

The problem is that natural rights are absolute and perfect because they're inalienable, they can't be taken away from you. But they also lead to a war between individuals who have these rights. That's a state of war in what Hobbes called "the state of nature." So that war can only be remedied by a contract or a covenant among those who equally consent to a sovereign. This is the official doctrine. And this sovereign is a government that secures the rights and it does so by limiting them. So that sets up a distinction between natural rights and civil rights, which is part of the basic structure of liberalism.

Natural rights are absolute but insecure. Civil rights are limited but secure. So you trade your absolute power in the state of nature for a limited power that works better, serves you, enables you to be productive and to live in comity with your fellow citizens.

Now, then what the business of the government does for you is to make your rights secure. But to do that, it doesn't say how you should exercise your right. So your right is a potential thing. It's not an actual thing like virtue, in which case you would be ruled and told by your ruler to practice certain virtues. No, it's you have a right to exercise, and the right to exercise that right, and also to have it protected, but it doesn't tell you what to say or do. So free speech doesn't tell you what to say, it leaves it up to you. And so there's a difference between the form, which is the right, and the practice, which you could say is the matter, the result, the effect, the way in which you actually exercise that right. And that distinction between form and matter is fundamental to liberalism. And the difference between the right to free speech and the choice of what to say.

And so Locke comes in by arguing that the two fundamental rights are free speech and private property. Free speech means not good speech but tolerable speech. So he writes the so-called [Letter on Toleration](#), it's one of his main writings, in which he says that the magistrate, meaning the government, is not concerned with your soul, but only with your body. And so it's not the business of the magistrate, the government, to save your soul. See there's the importance of the religious question always in Locke. And a church can't rule you. The most a church can do is expel you from membership, but it can't put you in jail for disbelief or things like that.

And then there's the right to property, there's today's free enterprise. And that's a right which again is potential, and how you exercise it, whether you become rich or poor or somewhere in between, that's again not the business of the government to achieve or to maintain.

There is an argument in Locke that everybody having the right to heap up riches is to the common good, is to the general advantage. What he calls "increase" and what is today called "growth," you hear this a lot from conservatives, "growth," meaning the heaping up of money.

So in these two ways, the tolerable speech, and the promise, not the guarantee, of increase, Locke applies a kind of virtuous standard to the exercise of liberal rights, these two most important liberal rights, after the right to consent.

And so that's the structure of things. And it's clear that, if you look at today, that one of those rights,

toleration, is the right of intellectuals, and the other is the right of businessmen. So people who are in the elites, who gain more than what is equal, do so for a common benefit. But not in a way as to be able to rule themselves, or to be ruled either. So there's this, what's called a private sphere or civil society, which is managed by government but not ruled by it. It represents our rights, and it does represent the different abilities, inequalities that we have in exercising them. And it provides an argument for liberalism that we won't suffer too much by abandoning virtue as our standard. We'll still have a modicum of virtue, or at least decency or honesty, and that will keep us in good order but also enrich us and liberate us.

So in this way, liberalism has an empty center. The public serves the private, but it doesn't define the private. And this is again, civil society. And liberalism stands or falls on its having this structure of government being understood as a process or a procedure or an instrument, hence legalistically, but not as a form of rule.

And this means that every liberal regime would have a constitution, and in the best sense, this was discovered, a written constitution, which offers a limited government, limited by the fact that it leaves the choice of how to live and how to exercise your rights to you.

So that's the empty center, it's a kind of vacuum. And nature of abhors, a vacuum. There are, in the first place, choices that are made that have consequences. Liberals exercise their liberal rights, and when exercising them, they don't leave them as they were. So the liberal rights over time, over history, don't remain so free and so formal as they might seem to be abstractly according to the doctrine of liberalism.

So in America for example, we had slavery, and that was a certain exercise of right, not really right, could be argued that way, but certainly Locke wouldn't think so, on the basis of race. So race has a certain status in American politics, which it wouldn't necessarily have according to the principle of liberalism. We heard this from Chief Justice Roberts when he was answering the a lawyer in the recent Harvard affirmative action case hearing; and the lawyer spoke of oboes, how a college would want to be able to free to choose oboe players. And Roberts said, "Well, we didn't have a civil war over oboe playing but over race." And so the question of racial discrimination is not a mere formality or something that can be left simply to private choice, as can oboe players for a college symphony.

In other words, there's always a status quo. And the status quo consists of the way in which rights have been exercised. And that affects the choice that is left to people living in a society with a tradition of liberalism. Your tradition, what it means, how you've previously exercised your rights and that affects your rights. So it isn't quite empty, in fact it isn't at all empty. It's like supposing that you can move your people to any site in the world, as if it were unsettled already. There's always a situation that you face, a status quo. And that's one way in which the empty center of liberalism gets filled.

And then the other way is through private groups like the family, like companies, corporations in the economy, and associations like our parties, political parties, not mentioned in the Constitution, but organized in accordance with, you could say the right of association. And [inaudible] worked out a dichotomy of liberals and conservatives, here we have again a partisanship of the common good, Aristotle seems to return. And we have two parties, one democratic, one oligarchic. They both exist in a democratic era. So one could modify Aristotle's statement of democracy versus oligarchy to Tocqueville's statement of the great parties that are found in every free society, those who want to extend the power of the people and those who want to restrain it.

And there you still see, I think left and right, and Democrats and Republicans. Democrats are the people's party, the Republicans are the virtue party, that's what I call it. But I mean, I say quickly before you gag in disgust at that description of the Republicans, at least they tend to believe that some people are better than others, or some people make more of a contribution than others.

And so here Aristotle returns in this private sphere, which in a way has to do with the direction of the public sphere, the government.

Now we come to weaknesses in liberalism.

KRISTOL: Rather than gagging in disgust, I'll just make the obvious point that, yeah, I mean as you say, liberalism was so impelled at the beginning by the horror at what virtue either could become or did become in politics, that maybe being the virtue party is — I mean, the claim has to be looked at, maybe be a little more suspiciously than one —

MANSFIELD: [inaudible] and it has to be made more democratic.

KRISTOL: Well, or just that virtue in practice isn't virtue often. Or those who claim virtue the most vehemently or loudly aren't always the most virtuous. And those who claim standing to be unequal aren't always, there aren't always good grounds for that standing. So that's the democratic challenge to the —

MANSFIELD: That's right. There's always drawbacks to every virtue. And there are vices surrounding virtue which you can easily fall into. So the Republican stands for the earner, back to what I was saying before.

KRISTOL: Yeah, more oligarchic. Yeah.

MANSFIELD: Who earn their living. That's a certain virtue, [inaudible] rather cold and unerotic, the American male. I'm thinking again, according to Tocqueville. Materialistic, money-loving and so on. But still there is something to making a living. And Lincoln gave a speech on this question on the American worker, in praise of the American worker, to the Wisconsin Agricultural State Fair. I think it was about 1856 around there something, in which he spoke of the American worker's refusal to do things in the way tradition demanded. Or the American worker is not a European peasant who does things the way his fathers did, but is always looking for a new way, a more efficient way to accomplish what he does. American worker at that time was of course the farmer. And so this is a kind of Republican Party virtue that I think is still alive and still powerful.

Now, liberalism has two weaknesses which I think are endemic to it. And it isn't that it has no weakness or it has an answer for every question. It does have answers but maybe they're not satisfactory. And that is in the fundamental doctrine of self-preservation or the right to life. And this can seem both too selfish, you forget the community, and too ignoble, you forget the best and the most challenging and the most essential. That's the left and the right. And those are represented in political philosophy, especially by Karl Marx, he's against liberalism because it doesn't pay sufficient attention to the common or to commonism, communism. And Nietzsche, that self-preservation is life denying and it's democratic nonsense and the greatest number, and corrupts, opposes, prevents the rise of the highest virtue.

And so this means that self-preservation is, in a way, too formal, you have to define it. And this forces you to towards the truth of Aristotle's view that all regimes have rule. Our two parties, neither of them is going to give devotion to the common good in any permanent way.

The common good conservatism worry is that we've gone further and further from the common good. But if you look at the last half century, since Eisenhower was elected in 1953, 1952, 70 years, that was the year I graduated from college, I'm having a 70 year reunion this coming spring. Each party has been in control about half the time, the country seems to be fairly evenly divided. This suggests that each party has to make way for the other, that there's truth in each side.

And this can lead to two ways of enjoying our political freedom. One with continuity: when it seems convenient, a new governing party can maintain the policies of the old governing party that it seemed to criticize when it was in opposition. And then just alternation: alternation of one way of doing things and then followed by another way, as happens with Title IX, for example, under the Trump administration versus the Obama administration and now the Biden administration. So it's a way of compromising, that is going back and forth on each side. And part of each party's way of doing things can stick and become continuity over time.

But these two weaknesses show liberalism criticizing itself. That began with Rousseau especially. So you could make a distinction between the development of liberalism, going from, I would say Machiavelli all the way to Montesquieu, and then the self-critique of liberalism following Rousseau, and up to our time

today when some liberals, both in the specific and even in the general sense, have taken to self-loathing in a rather unproductive and unattractive way.

I don't say that's true of all the common good conservatives, but they do share with the woke people on the left this dislike, mounting to disgust and denunciation, of their liberal country, speaking generically.

So what my suggestion might be, that is that the early liberalism, the development of liberalism is more interesting and more useful today for us to study than the self-loathing liberalism that begins with Rousseau. And so that's why I spend my time, for example, when I have been teaching a course on the history of modern political philosophy, I spend much more time on Hobbes, on Machiavelli and Hobbes and Locke. I don't do Montesquieu. And less time on Rousseau. And then the four Germans: Kant, Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche. And there is that disgust with itself that develops in liberalism and it might be helpful to us to look at the beginnings. So perhaps I could do that for a bit.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that would be excellent. And also, I mean maybe another reason for that is that, for all the weaknesses real and imagined, but real of liberalism, it seems to have a certain sticking power. I was looking at your book, *The Spirit of Liberalism*, one of the essays in it, from 1977, one of the essays in it is a review essay of Ted Lowi's, *The End of Liberalism*. And then of course Patrick Deneen recently has written *Why Liberalism Failed* I think. And of course back in the early 20th century, there was a ton of "the end of liberalism" sort of stuff floating around all over. And somehow it seems to be a little more persistent than people on both the left and the right have expected. So maybe there's some truth in it or some grounding in human nature or in politics?

MANSFIELD: It's not such a bad idea, at it's beginning. Yeah, or you can exaggerate this, like Frank Fukuyama, to say that liberalism is the "end of history" and it solves all our problems. That isn't really what he says, but it is what he's been taken to say. But yes, it seems to have a longer life than one would expect, thanks to America's defense of it, three large wars in the 20th century, one against the Nazis, one against the communists. So you're right about that.

Look at this critique of virtue and of rule begins with Machiavelli, let me talk a little bit about that. The gestation of liberalism in Machiavelli, it isn't something that he gave birth to, but it is something that he prepared.

Machiavelli's main principle is the necessity of *uno solo*, one alone. But he made a critique of morality, which you see in chapter 15 of *The Prince*, and he says that people who tried to be moral will come to ruin because they live among and will certainly come into contact among people who are not moral and who will take advantage of their morality to do them in and bring them to ruin. And therefore he proposes the general goal or principle of necessity to replace the best. The best gets you into trouble. It doesn't guarantee you success by any means, it doesn't even promise to. So the best needs to be replaced by necessity.

And what is necessary above all is not to depend on anyone else, because necessity means your own necessity. That necessity that you have to preserve yourself, and that means as against other people and also as against reassurances from those who think that God will help you. So Machiavelli says, "Never fall in the belief that somebody will pick you up." And that somebody could include, I think it's mainly meant to include, God.

So this means that when you adopt the principle of necessity that you sort of abandon the notion of normal or common or decent or honesty. People in general are not reliable. And by reliable, it turns out to mean reliable in every case. When you adopt the standard of necessity, you oppose what is normal because what about the abnormal? What about the situation when morality really will destroy you or cause you to ruin? So you have to understand that and anticipate that and take that into account.

So the extreme replaces the normal and this leads to a greater freedom because you're free of what is normal. And being normal can be very oppressive. At the same time you are doing what is necessary for you. So this liberation from the normal can lead to a new virtue which redefines virtue as deliberately leaving the normal, as always being in the mood to found something new, to look for innovation and to



look for ways of improving your own prospect, to continue founding or to continue innovating.

Now Hobbes, he also doesn't care for this new *virtu*, or Machiavellian virtue, of the independent prince, independent of morality. His notion of "one alone," he transforms or universalizes in what he calls the state of nature, which I mentioned before, the state in which all individuals are *uno solo* are one alone, alone in relationship of hostility and war with each other, leading to the necessity, because necessity is still the principle of Hobbes, of self-preservation.

And he says that the thing you can rely on is not being a prince, but on your own fear; the fear of violent death, the kind of cowardice which is in every human being he thinks, and is the most powerful thing in every human being, as opposed to courage, as opposed to virtue, which is fairly common but still by no means universal.

And he invents the notion of representation, of representative government. Government isn't what rules you, government is your rule of yourself. But when you do it yourself, it's no longer rule. It's a kind of adoption of the self-control that you might have in the service of whatever, not a virtue, but again, of preservation or comfortable preservation.

So representative government is government which is you. It isn't just that you elect representatives to represent your views to the government, but that you elect the government. That is what is new in modern as opposed to medieval representation.

So it's Machiavellian, but it's Machiavelli transformed. Because it's equal, all human beings are equal, this allows a proposition of science, that this, what Aristotle spoke of, the common benefit can be understood as a scientific understanding of human nature which is universal so that your rights are not just a virtue of innovation and mastery, but universal in the sense of rational and teachable, something you can show to others.

So scientific quality leads to and improves upon morality. It's a new morality of respecting rights. Demanding rights, and respecting other people's rights. And science and morality go together. So those are two things that you didn't see in Machiavelli, but they're done in the spirit of Machiavelli. And the sovereign that is consented to, covenanted for, according to Hobbes, is not a ruler.

Now in Locke, we see that sovereignty needs a steady consent. A single consent is not enough and doesn't provide sufficient protection for individual rights. So he goes to elections as opposed to Hobbes. Elections. And society needs balance and a check for ambition. He wants to liberate ambition but also to check it. And this requires him to change Hobbes's sovereignty to a government of separation of powers, in which there is the king and parliament. The king stands for Machiavelli's *uno solo*, the king's prerogative, and parliament, with its sovereignty stands for the right of legislation. And those two principles come out of the English Civil War of the 17th century.

So Locke, well, his abstract doctrine contained within it a compromised solution to that war which wouldn't involve or wouldn't require the victory of one side over the other, but which would produce within the government something which could attract Royalist partisans, mainly the prerogative of the king, and the partisans of Parliament in the sovereignty of Parliament. How in practice though they would be put together, one couldn't know, but it seems to have worked out.

And Locke made self-preservation more concerned with what he called, "the rest of mankind," besides yourself. So you're right, it's true, when your preservation comes in competition, you yourself go first, but you do have a concern for the rest of mankind. And then that also means for your fellow citizens. And this leads to the possibility of a defense of liberty. Whereas Hobbes spoke for cowardice and always ready to make a deal by surrendering your liberty, Locke, no, provides a possibility that you might risk your liberty in order to defend it.

Montesquieu: virtue returns. He speaks of political virtue, which he distinguishes from religious or moral virtue, but still it's something political. And he deals with the ancients at length, whereas previous liberal philosophers paid no attention to the ancients. I mean, they paid some attention but they didn't bother to

refute them. They mostly mocked them and ignored them or just denied them. But Montesquieu works out his liberal critique of the ancients in his book, the beginning, the first parts of his book, his famous book, *The Spirit of the Law*. So they're refuted, the ancients, but they're treated respectfully. Virtue needs limits, he says, just as everything else human. He is very strong for the enforcement of limits. And that leads to his version of the separation of powers.

And he believes that rights are mostly secured in opinion. That your opinion of your security is the crucial thing, the crucial test, do you *feel* or do you *think* you are secure? So that's what government has to do. It not only secures your rights, but it doesn't do so by frightening you, which is what Hobbes and to a lesser degree, Locke did. So this makes government more comfortable, more capable of tolerating our passionate political activities.

And for Montesquieu, *uno solo* from Machiavelli, becomes his definition of despotism. He actually speaks of the despot and he uses this phrase a whole lot, *un seul*, which is just the French for the Italian. And whereas Machiavelli says that's what you must aim at, Montesquieu says *un seul* is what you must most prevent from occurring. And he thinks that all philosophers before him, the ancients and then those from Machiavelli to Locke as well put too much faith in *uno solo*. Either you did it because *uno solo* was the most independent and the greatest scamp and rogue, like Machiavelli, or you did it as with Plato and Aristotle, that the best individual deserves to be the ruler. So he's a great one for opposing the tyranny of the best. And that's, you could say, the essence of liberalism to begin with, and he develops that perhaps in the most interesting and comprehensive way.

But he's, so to speak, the last liberal philosopher. After him comes Rousseau and the French Revolution and communism and Nazism, much nastier things.

KRISTOL: But after him also come the American founders, who, don't they call Montesquieu — is it Hamilton or Madison who calls Montesquieu “the incomparable?” I can't remember, Montesquieu?

MANSFIELD: The “celebrated Montesquieu.”

KRISTOL: Celebrated. Justly celebrated, yeah.

MANSFIELD: “Justly celebrated.” “The oracle of liberty,” he's called.

Liberalism is derivative from Machiavelli, but also from Aristotle. It's the critique of rule, but it's also rule. That's included in its critique.

But perhaps that's the same thing too in Aristotle, he also spoke, he had the land of virtue, but the land of virtue turns not to be a battle between democracy and oligarchy. And so there's a certain permanence of Aristotle.

If liberalism lasts longer than we expect, this is because it's derivative of Aristotle, it's a restatement of Aristotle. It's a question whether liberalism, or to use another term, modernity is something permanent. Was the thing that Machiavelli did to introduce modernity, was that a permanent change that we cannot reverse? Or is it otherwise? Because it seems that Machiavelli was opposing a situation, an emergency situation, in the tyranny arising from the Church, in the papacy. But perhaps that emergency would come to an end, or some other emergency might come? Or is this always an inherent weakness of Plato and Aristotle, that the best can always be understood as a source of tyranny rather than of inspiration?

So in this way, I think I would conclude by saying that Aristotle and Locke are both true, and they're both relevant.

KRISTOL: That's an excellent and thought provoking conclusion. And really a wonderful — I had flashbacks to more than 50 years ago, taking what was then Gov 106B, I guess, and then became Gov 1061, The History of Modern Political Philosophy that you taught in the spring term always, I think, after teaching the ancients in the first term. The “unjustly neglected Montesquieu” though, I now realize we should have —

MANSFIELD: Time to make up for that.

KRISTOL: Yeah, you've done it. Yes, thank you. But it was really wonderful, that survey, and so helpful. And that's a very wonderful last word too, about both Aristotle and Locke. So any last words beyond that last word? Or we'll just come back and discuss more whether modernity is temporary or permanent? Those are deep waters we can dive into in our next conversation.

MANSFIELD: That is actually raised by Montesquieu, that problem, that thing, because he thought that Machiavellianism had come to an end, wasn't needed anymore. But he didn't see what was coming after him, this self-loathing of liberalism. And so I don't know whether he would've thought that liberalism, and then hence this notion of self-preservation or necessity instead of the rule of virtue, that necessity might need to be maintained to counter the misinterpretations and opponents of liberalism.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I mean the illiberalism turns out to be in very, very different forms, obviously a permanent... if it's a permanent temptation or threat or possibility, then liberalism presumably has to be somewhat more, maybe not just based on a particular situation in 1513 or whatever, but somewhat repurposed to deal with other illiberal threats.

MANSFIELD: What is foreseeable is not given to us, I think, in this matter. Yeah, what future philosophers will find and criticize from previous philosophers is pretty much up to them.

KRISTOL: Interesting. Well, Harvey, thank you very much for taking this time to do this conversation and we will return maybe to do, yes, I think all these deep questions about modernity now have been raised now that we've dealt with liberalism, forms of illiberalism, liberalism and conservatism and other minor topics like this in this our 22nd conversation, but really a wonderful one. So thank you, Harvey Mansfield.

MANSFIELD: Thank you very much

KRISTOL: And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.