

Peter Berkowitz Transcript

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I: Our Illiberal Education (00:15 – 17:00)

KRISTOL: Hi, welcome back to CONVERSATIONS. I'm Bill Kristol, and I'm joined today by Peter Berkowitz, Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, author of fine books and articles on topics from Nietzsche to the American Founding to constitutionalism, international law, higher education – that's been a particular concern of yours recently at the universities.

And I thought maybe we'd begin there actually because I've been so struck by your writing on higher – writings on higher education, the universities, their problems. Everywhere I go, people say American higher education, best in the world, it's a jewel in the American crown, it's one of the areas we're most competitive in, something we should feel good about, no big problems. You don't agree with that.

BERKOWITZ: I don't agree with that. I see something a little different when I look at campuses, when I stroll on campuses, when I read what professors and administrators are writing about what should be done on campus.

And what I see is a hollowing out of the core curriculum, I see, I should say a hollowing out of the core, I see a politicizing of the curriculum. I see curtailing of freedom of speech, liberty of thought and discussion on campus. And increasingly, especially these last several years, an evisceration of due process on campus for students accused these days, usually in sexual harassment and sexual assault cases. So I see a bad situation.

KRISTOL: And what do you think the relationship of all these pieces is – I mean, sort of what's causing what, what's the problem at the core of it? Or is there one? Maybe there's several problems at once?

BERKOWITZ: Yeah, I think there is a root, and I think there are several problems at once. Let's take hollowing out of the core. That's got a history of cores. It goes back to – as many things do – roughly to the 1960s. Late 60s, early 70s, professors began to despair of, on the

one hand, of putting together a common body of knowledge and confidently saying this is something these books, these topics, these principles are something that all students should know.

This was combined though with an idea, really an ideology, which was ideology of emancipation; who are we to impose upon the students our conception of what it is to be an educated person, we're here at college to liberate students, the best way to liberate them, we'll begin liberating them from onerous requirements. For example, that every student must study principles of American government, principles of economics, literature, history, and the languages and so on.

So that's one problem. And you can see a liberationist ideology at work there. This is both hollowing out the core, politicizing the – politicizing the curriculum. That has to do with an overweening progressive confidence that we or they, the progressives, know what is true, know what is right, know what is proper, and it's the job of the university to impose this set of moral judgments on the students. Now, you might say isn't there a tension between those two views: liberate the students from onerous requirements and then impose upon them a set of moral and political judgments? And I would reply, yes. There's a very serious contradiction but our faculty and administration have learned somehow to live with this cognitive dissonance.

At the same time, why do they chill freedom of speech, why do they think now that a student or a faculty member who is offended by an opinion has a right to close down the expression of that opinion? I think it also has something to do with the idea that there is one set of judgments, and moral and political life is the right set of judgments, and there is no value to us in listening to the wrong set of judgments.

Similarly, in the evisceration of due process, we know who's guilty when a man is accused of sexual assault. Needless to say, rape is a heinous crime. If a student is accused of rape, the police should be called in, students guilty of rape should be locked up, for sure. But at the university, the reigning idea, the idea is that men are presumptively guilty concerning accusations. Once again, a judgment we know.

KRISTOL: Yeah. That is striking. I mean, I've also been struck by that paradox, that the universities seem more authoritarian than they were, I think, 30 or 40 years ago and less confident of their own judgment as to what students should learn. So there are no requirements but on the other hand, there's a kind of nanny-state character to it that people would have, I think, not rebelled against a while ago.

BERKOWITZ: Yeah, I think that's right and, of course, this abandonment of requirements is also a lesson taught to the students and the lesson taught to the students is there is no authoritative body of teaching so you're free to do as you please but that's limited by you're

free to do as you please so long as it comports with certain progressive or left-liberal understanding.

And by the way, I suppose we should talk about this, the near total absence, not of conservative professors but the teaching of – although there's also that on campuses – but more, much more worrisome is the absence of the teaching of conservative ideas. That is, I don't for a minute believe that you need to be a conservative to teach sympathetically conservative ideas, just like I don't believe you need to be a puritan to teach puritan ideas. But our universities feel no obligation, no pedagogical obligation to present the other side of the argument. Very troubling.

KRISTOL: And there is a kind of complacency about all this, right, that's what strikes me when I occasionally visit a campus and get beyond the students to the faculty or the administrators, maybe especially the administrators. They think they're sitting pretty.

I mean, they don't have to really take the burden of making judgments that some students won't like about what do they have to study A, B or C, that this is the core curriculum and some faculty won't like that. So they very, you know they have an easy life in terms of the faculty teach whatever they want, the students take whatever they want. They're at least allegedly happy or at least they don't quite see any grounds for objecting to that.

Then, they take care of the political interest groups with the kind of, you know as you were saying, with a kind of political correctness and so forth. And then for those students who just want to go on and get a job, the universities do make room for the kind of – you know, the kind of professional, pre-professional studies. And they all seem to just coexist happily and people like us, I guess, look like curmudgeons. I mean, what's not to like, everyone seems happy enough? The student's parents pay the tuition, so I guess the question is what's our complaint, really, you know?

BERKOWITZ: Exactly. If everybody on campus is happy, why are we complaining? The answer to that is because the lessons taught on university campuses, the lessons written and unwritten are destructive of a liberal polity. I don't have hard, empirical data on this, although I urge my colleagues in the political science world to test this hypothesis, those who are expert in empirical ways. We are told that there is intense polarization in the country. My colleague at the Hoover Institution, Stanford, Morris Fiorina and some of his colleagues have written several books to argue that yes, there is political polarization in the country but it's really actually confined to the top 10 or 15 percent of the political cultural intellectual elites. Well, where did those people come from? They come from our elite universities. And what do they learn at the universities?

Let's start with conservatism. One of the unwritten lessons of the university curriculum is we needn't teach this subject because it's not important, it's apparently not interesting. This sends two messages to conservatives, those conservative students on campus, it causes, it

induces a kind of resentment. How come the ideas that I care about aren't even featured in the curriculum? For the liberal students, they get a message of superiority and arrogance; our ideas are the right ideas, we needn't listen to other ideas.

In other words, what students are experiencing on campus and learning on campus tracks what we see in political life today. We do see resentment among conservatives, and we see arrogance among progressives.

KRISTOL: And I guess the other thing, it's bad for the country and I think it's an interesting point that the polarization does seem to coincide with the people who went to the more, more likely went to the elite colleges or were shaped in their thinking by them or perhaps law schools as well.

But I suppose it's also bad for education. Right I mean this is – I mean, it sort of is important to make the point, I think people could all be sort of – people who have worked out a – I don't know what you'd call it – an arrangement where each interest is satisfied. That's the not the same thing as actually educating people. You know everyone sort of could be happy enough or contented enough, it doesn't mean they're really be challenged or educated the way they should be.

BERKOWITZ: And we should mention one other interest that we haven't yet, and that's the interest of faculty today in specialization. Faculty are rewarded by writing on ever more narrow subjects and ever more technical fashion. Faculty have an interest also in teaching courses that deal with their narrow technical specialty.

But that faculty interest in that kind of course is at odds with, in my view, students' interest in getting a broadly liberal education, an education that prepares them for a life of freedom. So one of the reasons I didn't mention before, we didn't mention before, we should. One of the reasons that the core curriculum has vanished is because faculty don't want to teach broad survey courses.

That causes them – that would require them to return to books that actually at this point, if I may say so, many faculty will never have read. Who's going to teach these broad survey courses in American history, classical Greek history and classical Greek thought and European history? Increasingly, we don't have a faculty as prepared to teach the courses that necessary to lay a foundation for a properly liberal education.

KRISTOL: Do you distinguish in your analysis, I mean, you've – you taught a course at Harvard and you visited subsequently, taught at and spoken at so many colleges and universities and know a lot of people. Do you think the small colleges are better than the big universities, vice versa? Do you have a sort of view on that or –

BERKOWITZ: You know, I'm a graduate of a small liberal arts college, Swarthmore College. I think that today probably still at a small liberal arts college you'll have a smaller class, you're more likely to find a professor who is there because he or she is devoted to teaching. But I do think generally and for the most part, our elite small liberal arts colleges have done the same way as our elite universities.

There was a study, I believe it was published early last year, early this year, early 2014 by ACTA. And the study reviewed 25, the 25 top liberal arts colleges. And only a small number, a small number of our best liberal arts colleges are students actually required for graduation to take a course on the principles of American government, principles of economics, history and literature.

Generally and for the most part, even in our small liberal arts colleges, it's up for grabs. I mean, imagine if you had a patient in a hospital, a patient arrives in a hospital and the doctors say to the patient – what kind of remedy would you like, tell me how to cure you? And yet that's the attitude at our universities and colleges. The students are in the best position to somehow choose what it is that's going to – what it is that's going to define their education.

Of course, in a liberal education today, there has to be room for choice. Students should have a major. But if you're going to understand the hard political challenges we face today, if you're going to grow up as a person, you need to study the great things that have been taught and said in our tradition, in our civilization and in part as preparation also to study other civilizations, which should be part of liberal education.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I do think if someone came down from outer space and sort of looked. Here we are, the wealthiest country in the history of the world, the most educated, the most access to all these works that previous centuries people couldn't get. You know it was incredibly hard to find stuff, find books. And of course way back, it was hard to find manuscripts. And yet the neglect of these things, as you say, they're obviously some of the most important books ever written and music ever composed and paintings ever painted and the number of people – our smartest young men and women at our best colleges and universities studying these things is pretty small, actually. It's really, when you step back and think about it, it just is such a – it seems you know kind of crazy. But –

BERKOWITZ: This wasn't true when I was in college. I graduated in the early 1980s. But by the time I got to graduate school and certainly when I was teaching at Harvard, it was clear that to believe – to believe that the serious study of history and literature and philosophy and political philosophy was a study that would – was a study of treasures of western civilization, this was regarded as clearly a conservative view and therefore a view to be mocked and ridiculed.

My own view is that while this is certainly a conservative view, it reflects a desire to conserve the best of western civilization, it's also an opinion that's one, true, and indispensable to the liberal sphere properly understood. It's part of understanding freedom. To understanding our freedom is to understand where we've come from, how we got here, the institutions that defend freedom, what the shape of freedom looks like, how it can go wrong, how to use it well. And as Tocqueville might – did say, in the short space of your own life, it's hard to even if you had the gifts, to figure all that out for yourself. We have this amazing opportunity as you said – books available now online to study the set of, we should add, conflicting opinions about what is freedom and how to live with it and how to live well with it.

KRISTOL: Yeah, the conflicting opinions I'm struck by when I go to a school and someone will ask – to speak at a college – and someone asks a question and I try, you know especially if I'm in a college setting not to be particularly partisan or even polemical and I will say something, well, here's the argument I think against my point-of-view. And I try to replicate it, that's pretty obvious often, you know whatever, and here's – but here's why I think that's wrong.

And I do get the impression as students say to me, and I'm not particularly good at this or I'm not saying I do it particularly well, but students do come up afterwards and say, well, I never really heard a professor sort of do that kind of thing. You know, I am struck, and this is really is a change from when I was in school and when you were in school I think, there were liberal professors, there were Marxists, there were people who were not particularly good teachers, honestly, but there was a sense that you were supposed to represent something of the different points of view and give students a sense of the diversity of opinions out there, whether current affairs or historical questions or which political philosopher is right you know and that sort of thing. I really think that's, for students not to see that, I mean you just lose so much of an ability to think about questions, I think.

BERKOWITZ: I agree entirely and it's one of the ways in which our liberal education has ceased to be liberal. Now, it's important, it's very important I think for students to be introduced to let's say Burke, Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill from that period. But it's also very important for them to see modeled in the classroom the liberal spirit.

And the liberal spirit consists in at minimum stating the other – stating the other side of the argument. As Mill points out in *On Liberty*, we don't understand our own side. We have self-interest, we don't understand our own side. As we state the other side, we state it as strong a fashion as possible and figure out how to meet those – how to meet those arguments. Students are not learning that, as your story testifies.

II: At Swarthmore, Jerusalem, and Yale (17:00 – 33:00)

KRISTOL: So how did you – you mentioned going to Swarthmore – did you go there thinking you wanted a liberal education or did you just go there because it was a good school and you were a smart kid and you happened to get in? I mean, what sort of got you on the path to studying political philosophy and then to becoming an academic and a scholar and then an intellectual?

BERKOWITZ: I got lucky. I got into Swarthmore because of tennis. We were – oh, yes. Generally, Swarthmore's athletic teams were pathetically bad but we had, back then, a legendary tennis coach named Ed Faulkner. The year before I arrived, we won Division 3 national championships and my application was late but the coach made a special –

KRISTOL: I didn't know you were that good a tennis player. I'm impressed.

BERKOWITZ: Thanks.

KRISTOL: Well, all that Nietzsche stuff and the Founding. I mean, everyone does that.

BERKOWITZ: Everybody. A dime a dozen.

KRISTOL: So were a high school tennis star? Where was that, in Chicago?

BERKOWITZ: In Deerfield, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. Yeah, played a lot of tennis from –

KRISTOL: You were an athletic recruit? So did you play tennis in college?

BERKOWITZ: I certainly did, yeah. And I devoted a lot of time to it, three hours a day, seven days a week, every week of the year. It was terrific.

But somehow along the way – somehow along the way. And I didn't go in because I thought to myself, "What I need as a young man is a liberal education." But I do think that when I graduated – and I think this is something actually many students can't acquire today – by the time I graduated, I said to myself, "I know what I need, a liberal education."

I got something of a start of it at Swarthmore. By the time I graduated, I could see ways in which it was deficient. As I got older and studied more, I could see more ways in which it was deficient. But one great gift I got from Swarthmore was a kind of understanding as to why a properly liberal education was essential to me.

And also when I was at Swarthmore in my junior year, half by chance, I took a class in political theory as taught by a soft-Marxist. And we read it was a fairly typical survey from Hobbes through Marx. We ended with a book called *Knowledge and Politics* by a man named Roberto Unger, who at the time –

KRISTOL: Yeah, fashionable at the time. He was a very hot property, right?

BERKOWITZ: He was, and I want to say his first book, *Knowledge and Politics*, is a truly spectacular book, and this is the book that set, in a way, set me on my path. I must have read it five or six times. I was at Swarthmore. And he set out to provide a kind of, you call it, a total critique of modern liberal thought. Okay, that's very ambitious. But I was taken by the ambition and I was taken by the passion with which he examined ideas and insisted that the examination of ideas was highly relevant to our moral and political fates.

KRISTOL: Yeah, he was at Harvard Law School, I think. Which was a weird place for him to be because he was extremely theoretical and sort of neo-Marxist, I want to say. Is that fair? But yeah.

BERKOWITZ: He became more neo-Marxist but he was also heavily influenced by his Catholic education as a young boy.

KRISTOL: So he disliked kind of liberal, commercial bourgeois?

BERKOWITZ: Absolutely, yes.

KRISTOL: I remember sitting in on a class or two of his because I was at grad school at Harvard when he had come shortly before and was sort of making and he was being talked about. I couldn't actually understand anything. I mean, he was very dense and difficult.

That's kind of funny that that book launched you on your way, though. Well, it's a good proof that liberal education does not mean agreeing with what you – or what stimulates you since you are not where he is politically, I suppose.

BERKOWITZ: That's right. Of course, there were other books. I read shortly after I graduated from Swarthmore, I read a book called *After Virtue* by Alasdair MacIntyre in which MacIntyre posed a fateful choice for us. He said, "Modern, liberal modernity had broken down, the morality of liberal modernity had broken down, and we have a choice." Either Nietzsche who told the truth about liberal modernity or Aristotle. I thought, "Okay, I need to study some more Nietzsche, and I need to study some Aristotle." And one thing led to another.

I traveled to Israel, actually right after graduation, and I traveled to Israel for a number of reasons. But one of the reasons actually was that at Swarthmore, my professors, several of whom were very inspiring, one of whom you would have known from Harvard, Jim Kurth, James Kurth, who is an assistant professor at Harvard, he settled at Swarthmore. Terrific teacher. At that time, at that time, a man of the Left. And several of the professors in raising questions about conventional liberalism got me interested in the question of religion and origins. So I actually after I graduated, I packed my tennis rackets and I traveled to Israel to teach tennis on a kibbutz, which allowed me to do several things. Practice the only sort of profession I had, teaching tennis.

But also learn something about Israel and learn something about a form of life that I was very interested in at the time, which was the most successful experiment in collective living in the West, the kibbutz. That also turned out to be extremely instructive because I arrived on this kibbutz, now a famous kibbutz, Nir Am, which is on the Gaza border, the northeastern Gaza border, because I was there to watch kibbutzing unravel, to watch them slowly turn into rural bourgeois villages because the ideas on which they were based were not adequate to the challenges of life as it was developing in Israel and to the wants, needs and desires of the young men and women of ambition on the kibbutz.

KRISTOL: And so when you went to Israel, did you have grad school in mind or you just weren't sure or –

BERKOWITZ: Wasn't sure –

KRISTOL: You stayed there for a year or two years?

BERKOWITZ: I stayed there for a year, for the better part of a year on the kibbutz. Came back to the United States. Then I returned to Israel as a graduate student. I spent a year at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I was studying in the philosophy department and I had another fateful encounter with a book there. I was – too long a story for here – but I sort of found a way to pass a take-home exam such that I was admitted into the regular Hebrew language speaking program at Hebrew University, even though my language skills were not really good enough to be in that program. But in fact, I had a kind of advantage. Most of the books were – were read in English translation.

And I took a class called "The Critique of Religion." It was a year-long class. It began with Lucretius and went to Jaspers, Heidegger. About the second or third week into the class, I found myself wandering on the fifth floor of the social sciences library on Mt. Scopus looking over the old city. It was around sunset, just beautiful, the old city is sparkling, the sky is purple and pink and orange. I'm thinking to myself, "What am I going to do?" I'm not understanding a work of these lectures.

I walked through the stacks and my eyes glance upon a – glance at a book whose title is a little more than the title of the course. The course I was taking was "The Critique of Religion." And this book was Spinoza's *Critique of Religion*. I thought to myself, "How fantastic." At least for the week on Spinoza, I'm going to have a book that discusses the issues. I open the book up, and I look at the table of contents and I think, "Wow, really good luck today," because the book doesn't begin with Spinoza, the book begins with Lucretius and it's – and Maimonides and Hobbes and several other figures that we're going to be studying in the class. This is really my day.

I turned to the preface of this book – very small print, it put me off a bit. And then I began to read, and the opening sentence went something like this, study was written by a young man in Germany in the 1920s who found himself in the grips of a theological-political dilemma. I

thought to myself, “Wow, I’m not a young man in Germany in the 1920s but I’m sort of in a theological-political dilemma.” And that is how I first encountered Leo Strauss, the writings of Leo Strauss. And I spent a lot of that year studying in this course, learning Hebrew, but also reading the writings of Leo Strauss.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I think of all the different disciples, followers, people influenced by Strauss, I bet not that many began with Spinoza’s *Critique of Religion*. But that shows there are many, many different ways. And the essay of that preface is fantastic, of course. And you can still read it and reread it and learn things, and I think Strauss wrote it with the intention, I would say, almost of appealing to someone like the young you, you know, who was in a similar quandary or dilemma or uncertainty about religion, politics. And because the book itself is dense and difficult and scholarly but it was a book he’d written much earlier in Germany but the preface is really designed, I think, to pique the interest of the young reader, maybe the young American, the young Jew, maybe particularly.

BERKOWITZ: I myself think it’s one of the great essays of the 20th century on Jewish questions and philosophical questions, one of the great essays.

KRISTOL: So you finished up your university. Your Hebrew becomes very good. It is good.

You and I were once together at a conference in Israel – I remember this – and somehow they wanted to interview someone on Israeli TV, and you were the only person at the conference, I think, who had good enough Hebrew to actually do the interview on Israeli TV. And I remember just being, “Wow, that’s really impressive.” An awful lot of people can read some Hebrew, you know, you’ve gone to Hebrew school or something. But to actually do an actual Q&A live, ever since, you went way up in my estimation at that point. That was the tennis plus a live interview on Israeli TV. That’s a pretty good combination.

So you came back from Israel.

BERKOWITZ: I came back from Israel. While I was in Israel, I conceived the idea of going to graduate school in political science. I was accepted at Yale, and I accepted the offer. So in the mid-80s, I became a graduate in political science at Yale.

I – you know, and I came to Yale though as an innocent about Leo Strauss because especially in Israel, Leo Strauss is regarded as one of the two or three outstanding interpreters of Jewish philosophy in the 20th century because, you know, if you’re studying Jewish philosophy as a number of young men and women do in Israel, it’s not optional, you must read Strauss’s interpretation. But the debates which Strauss is most famous for in the United States, you know, reviving the ancients, the critique of the social sciences, being a mentor of political conservatives and all that, people in Israel at that time in the 1980s didn’t know about it, and I didn’t know about it either.

So I remember, maybe my second or third day at Yale, there was a meeting for students who thought they might want to concentrate in political philosophy. I knew I would. And the young instructor who was leading the discussion distributed a reading list and asked whether we had any suggestions of what might appear on the reading list. And I saw a number of Hobbes and a number of books about Hobbes and I said, "Well, isn't there an important book by Leo Strauss about Hobbes?" And the look on this guy's face, it was a look similar to the one, if you can imagine this, if I had suggested adding child pornography to the list of readings for political theory students. And this made me curious, of course, how had my simple suggestion so horrified him? And I began to do some research about what the name Leo Strauss stood for in the United States as opposed to Israel.

KRISTOL: And I'm just curious, when you went to grad school, did you sort of think you were going to go through and become on an academic track or was it more general, I'd like to learn and study some more and then I'll sort of figure out what I'll do?

BERKOWITZ: It was definitely the latter. I wasn't drawn to the calling of being a teacher. I certainly wasn't drawn to the calling of being a scholar. You could say this, was I continued to be a bit self-indulgent. I'm 24, 25 and what I'm thinking is I need to study more, I need to learn more. But by the end of three years, I had just about completed my dissertation, or I should say in my third year. And my dissertation was on Nietzsche.

It had become pretty clear to me that there was not going to be a place for me in the academy. I was writing about Nietzsche a little bit before the explosion of post-modern interest in Nietzsche as the great sage of democracy. And there was not a lot of enthusiasm in my department for the work that I was doing, and I noticed that I was regarded in a certain way by my colleagues. And I wouldn't say I despaired of getting a job, I just made a simple calculation that I was very unlikely to get a job.

So I went to law school straight out of – straight out of the graduate program. And by chance, when I was somehow, I guess my calculation was off, in my second year in law school, I was a law student at Yale. My dissertation won the Leo Strauss Prize, which was – could be a little bit misleading to those who are listening to this conversation. This is a prize given for best dissertations in a calendar year by the American Political Science Association but it does not signify that today Leo Strauss isn't held in high esteem by the American Political Science Association, to the contrary. In any case, that brought my name to the attention of a fellow named Harvey Mansfield, with whom I understand you've had a conversation or two over the years.

And one thing led to another and I applied for a position that had opened that year at Harvard. And by a strange confluence of events that probably could not have been repeated the year after and would not have come into existence the year before, I was fortunate enough to get an offer from Harvard to come as an Assistant Professor, which I did, actually even before I graduated from law school.

III: Teaching at Harvard (33:00 – 40:46)

KRISTOL: Excellent. So you came to Harvard as an Assistant Professor, a step up in the world from Yale, I must say as a Harvard grad. And you were there for about a decade. And it was you and Harvey Mansfield and others, a very successful, I think, preeminent, maybe, political philosophy program in the country. What was it like? Tell us about it.

BERKOWITZ: Well, as you can imagine, it was, actually I had some adventures in the – when I gave my job talk at Harvard. And afterward after I got the offer and I accepted, I got a call from Harvey Mansfield. And I had never met Harvey Mansfield until I went up for the job talk.

KRISTOL: What was your job talk on, Nietzsche? Safer, safer to do it on your dissertation, right.

BERKOWITZ: Safer to do on something I knew about. But on the other hand, it was a bit risky because Nietzsche was not a favorite subject in the august Government Department at Harvard, and there were people very skeptical. But I, for me, in a way, in a strange way, it was low stakes. I was a second-year law student at the time that I was given this, and it was an honor for me to be there and I was a bit removed from the profession.

And I think things got off on the right foot after I made my presentation. It was an empirical political scientist who was hosting this event and after I finished, he took the liberty of asking the first question and he said, he said to me, “Well, you know, I’m an empirical political scientist, and I just wonder, what could I learn from Nietzsche? How would it affect my research?” And I turned to him and I said, “Well, it’s true you’re an empirical political scientist. But you’re also a human being and a citizen.” Huge laughter in the Harvard department. And a human being and citizen, and you have some things to learn from Nietzsche. And that kind of set a much better tone for the job talk.

Anyway, got the offer and a week or so after the offer, I got a call from Harvey Mansfield, the great student of the history of political philosophy. Needless to say, as a young man, actually still today in awe of Mr. Mansfield. And he called and he said to me, “I’m delighted you’re coming but there’s something I want you to know. You’re going to be coming to Harvard with a label attached to you. There’s nothing we can do about it. But I also want you to know that from my point-of-view, you should pursue your studies as you think best.” It was really a remarkable telephone call. He didn’t have to do it. I received no other telephone call like that. And just in a simple way, was welcoming, letting me know what the lay of the land was and letting me know that –

KRISTOL: And the label was –

BERKOWITZ: Well, the label was “Straussian conservative.” Why? Because Harvey had enthusiastically supported my candidacy. No more need be said.

KRISTOL: Right. It's not like Nietzsche is a big conservative hero I wouldn't say, so, yeah. Nonetheless – Yeah, it doesn't matter.

BERKOWITZ: But also they could see that I had this attitude that students had a keen interest in studying the history of political philosophy – Plato and Aristotle, the Romans, medieval political philosophy, the whole history of political philosophy because the whole history of political philosophy is a living source of wisdom. Well, you must be – you must be an irredeemable conservative if those are your opinions.

KRISTOL: So, having – let's talk about Mansfield for a minute, then I want to hear more about your adventures at Harvard. So Mansfield as a colleague, that must have been interesting?

BERKOWITZ: Harvey was terrific. He from the get-go – and I was really green – he invited me to teach the year-long sequence. When I was there, it was GOV 1060-1061. I think it's 106A –

KRISTOL: 106A, 106B in my time, earlier times.

BERKOWITZ: And of course, this was a thrill. I learned a tremendous amount from him, sitting in on his lectures and throughout he again, as I said, I was quite green, I had a lot to learn. He treated me as a full colleague, and I remain very grateful for that.

He is, of course, as you know, tremendously entertaining. I remember early on at a faculty meeting, it was probably a year or so after the Berlin Wall was taken down, maybe the Fall of 1990. And at a faculty meeting, a colleague of ours, a distinguished political scientist, had told the table – I should have said faculty meetings in those days were conducted over dinner. So before dinner in the faculty –

KRISTOL: So this is the Government Department.

BERKOWITZ: It was a Government Department, yes, sorry. The Government Department was meeting for its monthly faculty meeting, dining room at the Faculty Club. Several tables of 8 or 10. At our table, one distinguished colleague was speaking about a *New York Times* Sunday magazine article he had read about theoretical physics, the outer boundaries of theoretical physics where some of those physicists, world-acclaimed physicists dealing with string theory, whatever, were discovering that in order to carry forward their reflections, they had to do metaphysics. They needed poetic language. And this distinguished political scientist carried on with his reflection to say, "So maybe we in political science should not feel so badly. After all, if the paradigm of natural science, physics needs metaphysics and poetry, maybe our – the preliminary character of our – of social science today should not be cause for concern."

There was a moment's pause and then our friend Harvey said, "Yes. But do the natural scientists have a catastrophe to predict like our catastrophe – a failure to predict like our failure to predict the greatest event of the last 50 years, the collapse of Communism?" Utter silence reigned over the table for the rest of the meal.

And Harvey had, I remember from that period one other – one other great statement at a faculty meeting. He explained to his colleagues that his colleagues had two problems in understanding the Cold War. One, they didn't understand it was a war. And, two, they didn't understand that we won it. In listening to this, I thought to myself this was also sort of a formative moment that he was certainly right that my colleagues didn't understand that it was a war and didn't understand we won it. But I also understand I certainly didn't fully appreciate those two propositions, and it was, say, an important point in my education and giving me a direction as I studied America and America's role in the world.

KRISTOL: That's good, that's good. So you taught political philosophy. You enjoyed it. You're a successful teacher, I know.

BERKOWITZ: I enjoyed it very much. I had terrific students. I had an opportunity to teach the courses that mostly that I wanted to teach and so I regarded as a – I regarded myself as terrifically fortunate to have great students and to be able to learn more about the books I cared about.

IV: Political Correctness on Campus (40:46 – 1:03:25)

KRISTOL: And then your tenure at Harvard came to end in what was at the time a somewhat famous fight or controversy or something. People would be interested, I think, to hear about that because I do think it was a bit of the marker in the closing of the academic mind, if I could paraphrase Allan Bloom. And so what happened?

BERKOWITZ: Well, it's quite a story but I'll try to make it brief. Like others, after my – I guess it would have been after my sixth year, I came up for a review for promotion to tenure. Now, one of the, I regard, as paradoxes of my story, my battle with Harvard, is that I regarded myself as having arrived at Harvard with more open eyes than almost anybody I knew. But this is partly thanks to – thanks to my colleagues who apart from Harvey and Judy Shklar who passed away two years after I arrived at Harvard, I think, in '92, and one or two others – most of my colleagues let me know in one way or another that they were at best indifferent to my presence and would be just as happy when six or seven years rolled by and I found gainful employment or not elsewhere.

So I had no illusions. And I don't think I ever had illusions. And so but nevertheless, when at the end of my sixth year, it became to put together my tenure file, knowing what the odds are, I nevertheless put it together and it occurred to me that something had happened that would make this not outlandish, this promotion and tenure. What would make it not outlandish is that at the same time that I was coming up for tenure, a woman was coming up for tenure,

also taught political philosophy. And I think it's fair to say two things. One is that across all the dimensions that you might be evaluated for promotion, my record was not less strong than hers. And the second observation is they wanted to give her tenure. So my colleagues were put in a bit of a bind by the fact that we both came up for tenure at the same time. And while there was a great deal of opposition, at the end of the day, I was the – the department voted to recommend both my female colleague and I be to tenure.

Four or five months after this vote, President Rudenstine, then President of Harvard University, conducted his secret review, the ad hoc committee meeting to which three outside scholars are invited and two Harvard faculty members. And the Department makes its case before this secret court and both those who voted in the affirmative make the case and those who voted against the tenure – the tenure, the candidate for tenure. And then the President of the University gets advice from the three experts from outside to inside Harvard and makes his decision. Both of us were denied tenure.

Now, the first reaction is that's the way it goes. Harvard has a right as a private university to devise a process as it sees fit. Its process gives almost arbitrary and unlimited power to the President of the University; he has no obligation under Harvard's rules and regulations to explain his decision. Are the rules. So there's not really much basis for appealing his decision. And in my particular case, this was the odds were stacked against me, and I certainly wouldn't dream of saying that such a thing was owed me by Harvard, as if there weren't lots of very serious people, astonishingly good scholars at other universities.

So what happened, how did it then happen that I engaged in a six-year battle against Harvard University, first inside the university and eventually filing a lawsuit in the courts of Massachusetts for breach of contract? The President's decision almost involves arbitrary and unlimited judgment. He's not – the President of the University and the rest of the University is not free, so I argued for six years, is not free to disregard its own procedures in reaching the decision. And it came to light in the months following the tenure decision that Harvard had in a variety of ways violated its own process, it had violated its own procedures.

And there were one or two people at Harvard who were interested in this case, especially a fellow named Charles Nesson at the Harvard Law School. And we talked and more information came to light. And at a certain point, and it is I think still a bit paradoxical, I determined that while I got a result I expected and that Harvard has a leeway, and I expected a politicized decision and all that, that I was being given resources that were very unusual. Most people in my position were not being given resources to mount a challenge. And so with Charlie Nesson's help, I lodged a formal grievance with Harvard University, alleging that in a variety of ways, Harvard didn't follow its own procedures.

I'll give you two examples. Really, I suppose one, a cluster of examples. And I suppose this is all part of the public record, we can name names. There was, I had a colleague named Dennis Thompson. Dennis was also a teacher of political philosophy, he was also the head of the

Program on Ethics in the Professions, he was also the Vice Provost of the University and he was, Dennis was strongly opposed to my promotion. Maybe it was because I wrote a harshly critical review of his book, *Democracy and Disagreement* for *The New Republic*, maybe not, who knows? Published just before my tenure file closed. Who knows?

But I argued that he was – he had a conflict of interest because he was both opposing me in the Department and he was an advisor to the – he was part of the President's Cabinet and an advisor to the President. So he was sort of both an active party and part of the team judging. But it gets even worse because Dennis was also sleeping with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in charge of tenure review. Now, I hasten to add that that woman was his wife. But the Harvard rules and regulations clearly stated at that time that an official is not involved in a romantic relationship with another official, may not be in a supervisory capacity. So this was a double violation because as Associate Provost, he was her supervisor but she is the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in charge of tenure review, was supervising him as a member of the Department.

So I also argued that the committee of experts was not a committee of experts that was advising the President. So he's free to reach any decision he likes. But I argued that he was not free to be advised by a scholar who was an expert on German fairy tales on my case, and he was not free to be advised by a child psychologist. And he was not free to be advised by somebody who had written about the European – the German bank. He was – he had an obligation to be advised –

KRISTOL: This was your outside committee?

BERKOWITZ: This was my outside and inside committee. There was a Harvard professor who was an expert in German fairy tales, another one who was an expert on empirical child psychology. I had written a book on Nietzsche, and I had written a book on the modern liberal tradition. And so I argued that – so the crux of it was that the President and the Deans have an obligation to follow their own procedures.

Harvard sat on my grievance for a year, running out the clock. I think it was the weekend of Memorial Day, everybody was off campus. They slipped under my office door an eight-page, single-spaced letter, obviously prepared by a lawyer explaining to me why – not why my grievance was rejected, but why I wasn't entitled to a hearing about my grievance. Not entitled to a hearing on the grievance. I had submitted something like 27 single-spaced pages of various conflicts of interest. I was not entitled to a grievance hearing.

So I – my time ran out. I was fortunate to get a job teaching law at George Mason University Law School. And in Washington at that time with the help of Martin Peretz who was the editor of *The New Republic*, I filed a lawsuit against Harvard. The lawsuit wended its way through the courts for three years. Another time, I'll tell you the details. But at the end of the

day, the Supreme Court of Massachusetts concluded that once again I failed to state a claim on the basis of which relief could be granted, my breach of contract lawsuit could not be heard by a jury.

KRISTOL: I remember just following it from afar, obviously with much less intensity of knowledge than you. But I remember being shocked. I mean, what struck me was the cavalier attitude. I mean, Harvard decided at some point they wanted to reach the decision they reached – or Dennis Thompson did and persuaded Rudenstine or something. And then they just reached the decision. And for people who allegedly believe in due process and all these kind of liberal things, they were utterly contemptuous of it. That's my main memory as more evidence coming out. I remember personally I had no great high opinion of universities at that point and of Harvard's administration, or being sort of shocked by the stuff as it came out.

BERKOWITZ: This was a very important lesson for me, and it's though I don't write about that case and I don't write about tenure questions generally, it's what you said, Bill, is the utter indifference to and sometimes contempt for due process, sometimes from the very people who have devoted their careers to arguing that we have to turn politics into a neutral decision-making process.

I have to say this, among colleagues as well, I think I was very careful at the time both in what I said at Harvard, what I wrote in my last year or two at Harvard and in the way in which we framed the lawsuit to make clear this was not a case about my merits, this was a case about formal process and about the obligation of universities to keep their promises in regard to the process, the forms that they promised to their students. I would say that not more than two members or three members of the Harvard faculty even expressed interest to a challenge based strictly on forms and process. And I think we continue to see down to this day, but especially these days both in regard to the chilling of speech but also into the kangaroo courts that have been created in cases of accusations of sexual misconduct we see the same contempt for due process. You can't learn about freedom if your university teaches you contempt for due process.

KRISTOL: Yeah, and I remember following it from afar with interest as a Harvard and as someone who taught a little bit at Harvard, albeit in the Kennedy School, primarily. But a grad student at Harvard, certainly. I had taught in the same class that you and Mansfield ended up teaching 15 years later – being shocked by it. And then thinking at some point in the mid – I guess about seven, eight years ago after Larry Summers was fired or forced to step down as President of Harvard, which was what, maybe the Spring of 2006?

BERKOWITZ: About 2006, yes.

KRISTOL: Thinking that the one-two punch of your case and Summers really was a moment where Harvard, which, I think for all of its problems, had managed to sustain more in the way of liberal education, I think, than a lot of places in the 80s and 90s. And it was just had changed. I mean, really it was not the Harvard I had gone to or studied at or even taught at in the early mid-80s.

BERKOWITZ: I think you're right. The Summers case is an extraordinary case. I think we should remind people what happened. Larry Summers, a person who is much admired by students, went to a closed door session.

KRISTOL: Distinguished economist. Liberal, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury under Bill Clinton. No right-winger.

BERKOWITZ: No right-winger, Larry. But he cared about education. So one day, he's invited by, I think, it's the National Labor Review Board to address a closed door session of academics, administrators who are concerned that there are not enough women in the sciences. Now, this concern is connected to the observation that women had made great strides in the humanities, strides in the social sciences. But they were not nearly represented in relation to their proportion in society in the natural sciences.

So Summers gives a talk, again, behind closed doors, off the record. And he does what you would expect a scholar to do. But I must say, I also think it was perfectly appropriate for a President of a University to do. He said, "Let's consider some hypotheses." And one hypothesis is just in the natural sciences, the men are more chauvinistic than in other fields. He said, "In my experience, that's certainly not true. I know scientists who would cut off an arm to have more women in their field. I don't think that's it." And he said, "There's another – here's another hypothesis. It comes from the observation that at the extremes in regard to various qualities and attitudes and abilities, you find more men. So when it comes also to theoretical intelligence, for every one woman with the kind of highly, highly developed theoretical intelligence necessary to prosper in the natural sciences and physics, there are four men. But two things about that. One, that means that for every female moron, there are four male morons because of the distribution."

But Summers also said that can't be the explanation because we live in a country of more than 300 million people and so even though there may be more men than women, there are plenty of women to be eligible for these positions. He said, "So, I've got a different hypothesis. I think women, I think intelligent women in age 22 or 23 who have this highly developed theoretical intelligence, I think they look at the situation analytically and they say to themselves, 'I go to law school three years, I'm practicing law by my late 20s. And if I want to by the time I'm in my early 30s, I can start a family. I can go to medical school probably by mid – early to mid-30s, start a family. I can go to business school, early to mid-30s start a family. But if I go to physics, boy, I'm going to have to work in a lab first, then maybe I have to spend five or six years in graduate school, then I've got three or four years as a post doc.

And then I've got four or five, six years until I can get tenure. I'd be 40 until my hours stopped involving six and a half days a week, 12 to 14 hour days. Plus it's a lot riskier. I won't know for sure until I'm 40. Plus, my salary is going to be a lot lower."

So, Summers said, "I think the rational calculation is women decide against. So maybe we have to make some changes. I think it's not out of male dislike of women in the sciences." Well, there was a woman in that audience. I believe her name was Nancy Hopkins, who ironically taught biology at MIT, I think. She left the room. She called *The Boston Globe*. She said, "I feel faint. I feel nauseous. Larry Summers has said that women are inferior to men. They don't have the intelligence to do this."

As you can see, I believe the speech is still, [the transcript up online](#), you can find it. So this is terrible thing, she did is terrible for the Harvard faculty to have – to have acquiesced in this attack on actually freedom of speech and intellectual inquiry, but in my view, President Summers did a terrible thing in apologizing not once but repeatedly. My recollection of this period is that the country was actually with him. I think there was a story in *Time* or *Newsweek* in the first week of the controversy saying, "What's going on?" And if I recall correctly, the editor of *The Weekly Standard* even allowed me to – I wrote something about this, yeah.

KRISTOL: No. I mean, then he apologized, and then it didn't do any good, of course, and they drove him out of town, and I do think that was a moment. I mean, the idea that a speech, in this case a private speech, but it wouldn't really have mattered, I suppose, where he speculates on various causes of things. And in a very – in a way that's sympathetic to the people about whom he's speaking and in a way that's an attempt – he's an economist, an attempt to sort of grapple with the data that is out there – that you get driven out of your job for that really, I think, was a precursor to what we've seen over the last decade or so mostly in the academy but also elsewhere now, these basketball owners and stuff, I mean, they say stupid things and somewhat offensive things.

But the idea that privately stated opinions are now cause for sort of mob – mobs to assemble and run you out of town when there's never a demonstration or even a thought that you should be required to demonstrate actual discrimination. You know, if someone, if Larry Summers had been systematically tenuring male – men and not women, it would have been quite appropriate for people to complain and say that's not appropriate behavior for the President of the Harvard. No one even came close to suggesting such a thing. It wasn't even – in fact if anything, it was the opposite.

I think Larry Summers was very concerned to try to, as his own speech suggests, to think about how – why would he bother going to this conference unless he was concerned about the lack of women in some of the natural science departments? So it's really very bad, I think, for the country this kind of mob rule based on two sentences that someone says somewhere and not connected to action.

BERKOWITZ: Actually, I want a university president who will say to the incoming class at this college, at this university, “You have a right to be offended. If a week transpires during the semester and you haven’t heard an opinion that makes you feel uneasy, uncomfortable, I want you to come to me and I’m going to have to encourage more freedom of speech, more – I’m going to have to encourage better diversity of opinion because if you’re not being offended in the give-and-take of conversation” – it’s not arguing for uncivil discourse. Civil discourse, tough opinions that you find unpleasant. If that’s not happening once a week, you’re not getting a liberal education.

KRISTOL: And, you know, this goes back to the point you made earlier. If universities can’t tolerate free debate, then of course, other institutions aren’t going to either. And we’ve seen that over the last year or two, and I do think it’s connected. If the universities are going to let someone be offended by something and then discipline a professor or get rid of a president, well, then corporate America, which is incredibly risk-averse and timid and doesn’t have a commitment to free speech, squash free speech the way a university does, you know, if someone says something inappropriate, gives money to a campaign that some people don’t like or something, then they feel no hesitation in turning their guns on the CEO of Mozilla or God knows all these different cases now that we’ve seen in the private sector and the public sector. It really is worrisome in a liberal society.

BERKOWITZ: It’s very worrisome, and as you’re suggesting, they’re putting into practice, 30-somethings and 40-somethings are putting into practice a code of conduct hostile to freedom of speech that they learned at the universities.

KRISTOL: Which is ironic since the universities are supposed to be – the normal teaching would have been in the old days, well, the universities have real freedom of speech, and, look, in real society, you have to curtail it in certain ways because that, the life of real politics, real social life isn’t quite as free as those little bastions of true intellectual freedom in the universities.

But now it’s the – I do think it’s the colleges and universities that have been leading the way in eroding a real respect for free speech and really freedom of thought. I mean, that’s the other – this is a point Mill makes, I think, that John Stuart Mill makes which they should, the liberals who claim to like Mill should think more about.

BERKOWITZ: Freedom.

KRISTOL: If you don’t have real freedom of speech, eventually, people stop – you know, you don’t want to think about things because you might say something and so you just put things out of your mind. And it really is damaging, I think.

BERKOWITZ: It’s very damaging. You know, we’re putting together a picture that explains that the reigning dogmatism or the reign of dogmatism on university campuses. It’s the absence of opposing opinions and actually the aggressive silencing of opposing opinions or

even more, building a university world, building an intellectual life, building a curriculum where lots of ideas, ideas that shaped us – one might add, I would also add ideas that are inherently valuable – but ideas that shaped us are simply off-limits.

V: How to Get an Education (1:03:25 – 1:19:03)

KRISTOL: So, as Lenin said, “What is to be done?” We have these complacent universities that are wealthy and that still get extremely bright young people applying because it’s still an important credential and a good sorting mechanism for businesses. The faculty have an easy life, the administrators have pretty cushy jobs actually and there more and more of them. The students are having a good time taking whatever courses they want and not being pushed too hard, most of them. So how does it get shaken up, and what advice would you give either students or parents or others?

BERKOWITZ: It’s very hard as you suggest to find a lever of reform, and almost invariably after I read a piece about liberal education, I get email from concerned parents. “I am the father or mother of a son or daughter who’s 16, we’re looking for colleges, what should we do?”

The first thing we should say is this: At every college and university of which I’m aware, it’s still possible to get a good education. Now, the universities and colleges of which I’m aware are not going to provide you wise counsel about how to move through the university so as to put together a sound curriculum for four years. But engaged parents can help their kids, their sons and daughters, at college navigate. Almost everywhere, there’s still dedicated professors who come to the classroom prepared and are there to open up books and explore ideas with students. So that’s the first thing to be said.

Second is that you’re right, if we examine the interests and we examine the powers, it’s hard to see how reform or significant reform is going to take place. Students come and go. They’re there for four years, before you know it, just as they’re beginning to understand, they’re gone. Faculty, tenured faculty, comfortable. Administrators, by and large, they’ve come up through the system, they don’t want to rock the boat. So where is a constituency for change?

I see two possibilities with state universities, public universities – state legislatures, they foot the bill, or they foot a big part of the bill. And with private universities, also state universities as well, alums. I think something like a third, at least a third of the university’s budget comes from giving, a third of the endowment, a third of the budget. Now, the typical giving from wealthy alums is a kind of blank check. Or, not blank check, a specific number is written in but once the money is given, universities do with it as they please.

So one could hope for more targeted giving by alums. This is also fraught because we also don’t want wealthy people dictating university policy. University policy should be formed and implemented by professors and administrators. But I see nothing wrong with, let’s say, a wealthy alum saying, “I would like to give \$20 for classes in the study of the history of

western civilization.” That’s certainly within, let’s hope, within the boundaries of what universities teach. The problem is, as we’ve discussed, is that alums also have their interest. Sometimes, they want to give money to ensure that their kid will get admitted. Sometimes, they want to give money to show off to their – to show off to their classmates 25, 30 years down the road that they’ve really made it, and they’ve made it by giving a building or giving a professorship or whatever.

But I think that individuals who care, groups that care – and some of this by the way has already begun. There’s an organization in California to address alums and educate them about giving. But there’s another matter, another route to follow, and that’s a route that’s followed by organizations that you’re intimately involved with and I as well, the Tikvah Fund and the Hertog Foundation.

KRISTOL: I want to get to those. I think it’s awfully important going around the universities. But I do think in – I think one thing that would be helpful, Bill Bennett made this point almost 30 years ago and it just never has – never been really operationalized, is if you think about K through 12 education, parents think they kind of have a sense of what their kids should learn and they’re not embarrassed to intervene if they think there’s a bad teacher or a bad principal or the curriculum is all messed up and they think they have a right to have an opinion about it and they go to the school and complain, they go to their state their local school board and complain if it’s a public school, they move their kids from one school to another.

Somehow everyone is so intimidated by higher education. Now, it’s one thing if it’s – like my grandparents, if it’s immigrant grandparent – parents, and “What do they know?” and of course, they’ve got to just be so grateful their kid got into a good school and not intervene. But now you have people who are extremely well-educated, lawyers, let’s say, sending their kids to college. Their kid is taking a political science class. These lawyers know a ton about politics. They’re very prominent people, often very well-educated themselves. They know that the kid’s stuff is, the stuff he’s learning is either politically biased or just superficial or silly, and yet them somehow feel still, well, it’s higher education, I can’t – I can’t sort of say, you know, I don’t even – it’s amazing how parents I find don’t even give their kids much guidance about what classes to –.

Leave aside shaking up the whole university. There is that kind of – I do think it would be healthy if somehow the demystification side of it could be really pushed much further. I guess that’s happening gradually. Reading lists are online, you know, student evaluations are online. A little harder just to get away with maybe, you know, the kind of insularity of the colleges being broken up. I don’t know. It doesn’t seem to be having much effect yet I’ve got to say. But you’d think it would have an effect at some point.

BERKOWITZ: That seems right. Maybe one factor is that in regard to K through 12 education, the parents are nearby. The kid's at home. And you know, Harvard, Stanford, Swarthmore, the University of Illinois – it may be faraway. But there also is the intimidation factor and, you know, the august professor says, "I'm an expert," or the dean says, "It's very complicated. You, of course, are a professional lawyer or a doctor or business executive, and I'm a professional educator, and there are complexities here that would be very difficult to explain to you."

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's a good point. That's a good point. But I do think somehow, you know, just encouraging people who are quite knowledgeable to butt in a little more wouldn't hurt.

BERKOWITZ: So we who have some access and have a platform, it's part of the battle, have to keep making the case and keep encouraging the parents, addressing parents and students to see really how much actually is at stake in getting a proper education, getting a good grounding in principles of government and economics, history of the West and languages and other cultures.

KRISTOL: But in any case, hopefully, students can learn something at the particular college or university they're at. But as you were about to say, of course, colleges and universities aren't the only places people can get educated.

BERKOWITZ: Well, these foundations that we are both involved in are, in my view, are doing amazing work. What they're doing is, in effect, creating an alternative academic universe. Tikvah, the Tikvah Fund, headquartered in New York City, specializes in educational programs both in Israel and in the United States, and the subjects are both a wide range of Jewish subjects but also principles of politics and economics. Subjects generally and for the most part, that really are neglected at our universities.

The Hertog, the Hertog Foundation is, I suppose, in its way more eclectic but it still concentrates in educational programs. You've taught in the Hertog Political Studies summer program in Washington, DC. It's a six-week program that introduces students at a high level, political philosophy, American political thought, American politics, foreign policy – a kind of study that really is hard to come by at the universities.

We've been, so far, we've talked a lot about politicization of the curriculum but there's also scientism in the university, such that a significant part of the offerings of a political science program will involve study of methods for studying political science. And those subjects that draw not just young people but people to the study of politics – questions about justice and injustice, questions about power, questions about diplomacy, military might and so on. Questions about public policy. These questions often get neglected in political science departments, and the Hertog Foundation brings it together in their program. But the main

idea – and by the way, Hertog and Tikvah are not the only ones, as you know, a number of foundations, Claremont too, Claremont College, creating summer programs to supplement student study at the universities.

KRISTOL: And of course, these online things that we're doing here, and the Foundation for Constitutional Government is doing – is also, it's not like students can't learn, young people can't learn by watching things online and reading things online as well.

BERKOWITZ: I think that's right. You're, part of what you're doing is considerably lowering the costs for students to gain access to the history of political philosophy. It's a huge service. And you know, these days, in any number of ways, you can come across the name Edmund Burke, the name Leo Strauss, for that matter, the name John Stuart Mill, which is really not easy to study. Mill is not easy to study at universities these days. *The Federalist* is not required in most political science departments. And yet thanks to online programs, students have almost immediate access to it. And that's a tremendous development because the truth is these books we've mentioned and many, many others are inherently very compelling.

KRISTOL: Right. It's like your story of finding Strauss in the stacks. I mean, the more my thought has always been we can't really – we can try to market these so more and more people know about them, but basically if you put it out there, one hopes that bright young men and women and not so young men and women will find things, get led from one thing to another, hear about something in a conversation that we're having, get steered maybe to look at John Stuart Mill and then find other resources that are online or not online, there's other good programs to learn, to study Mill, which might lead them to think about Mill by contrast with Aristotle and suddenly you're really thinking.

And not just in political philosophy. It's the scientism or disciplinary academic character so much, as taught in colleges these days, classics departments, literature departments, they don't teach the great books, they teach whatever the latest academic fashion is about how to talk about the great books or not even so great books, maybe some mediocre books because, you know –

BERKOWITZ: They teach what advances their interests as specialized practitioners of their discipline, but there's no reason to assume, and it's obviously not the case, that that converges with what students need as part of a liberal education.

So, look, we need leadership at the top. We need deans, we need presidents of universities who speak out forcefully on behalf of liberal education. To tell you the truth, since Bart Giamatti in the 1980s, I – please help me here – but I can't think of a university president who has been a forceful spokesman for liberal education.

KRISTOL: Yeah. No, I've tried to think of historical analogies but in a way, it's often happened, the universities were not the home of liberal education for much of modern history. I think a lot of institutions were invented, for example, in Britain and France in the

Enlightenment, that were – the universities were conquered by what Hobbes called “Aristotility.” And so that’s why there’s the Royal Society to advance science in London, which was a think tank, you might say. And that’s why there’s the *Encyclopédie*, I think, in France. What is it, just a bunch of people putting together words very much like, actually, some of the online reading lists and material that we all are sort of interested in helping produce these days?

You know, I don’t exactly what was happening at the universities in France, but I assume from their point-of-view, they were dominated by the Church and by orthodoxy and so it was all done outside. A lot of real liberal education has been done outside the universities for, you know, if you look at human history.

BERKOWITZ: Actually, I think that’s a very important point. You know, our situation, actually it turns out, is not unique. There was Hobbes’ critique of the university, there was Rousseau’s critique of the intellectuals in the *First Discourse*. There was Nietzsche’s savage criticism of university education of his day. And so on down the line.

There is some truth that there was a golden period of liberal education. Now, this doesn’t – telling, providing this account of the critique of university life over the centuries in liberal modernity, maybe doesn’t lessen the need for reform today, but it helps put the need for reform in perspective. We are not the first generation to face universities that are failing in their mission.

KRISTOL: The good news is, I do think, it’s easier to get material and perspectives and attempts to help people think about these things to – at least in front of students, whether you can get them to really read it and then following up is hard, sometimes, you know, but I do think it’s – yeah, I mean, it’s not the first time the universities have failed in their mission in the U.S. or in – I mean, think of American intellectual life, incidentally.

You could go a long way down studying American intellectual history, American, history of American political thought, history of American literature, history of American criticism even – before you run into a professor. You know, I mean if you think about the whole 19th – we have an awful lot of great novelists and great writers, critics in the 19th century. But in the 20th century who weren’t – who weren’t professors or if they were, were very tangentially related to the mainstream of academic thought. So I think, yeah, I suppose, one shouldn’t get too depressed but it is, on the other hand, there’s these huge institutions now with a huge amount of money and kind of a chokehold on getting all these bright young men and women there for four years.

BERKOWITZ: And claiming to be providing liberal education when what is a false simulacra of liberal education. So okay it’s true, we do face special challenges characteristic of our age, that’s true.

KRISTOL: But we’re going to grapple with them and overcome them.

BERKOWITZ: That will continue for sure.

KRISTOL: Thank you, Peter, for joining me today. And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]