

Interview with Harvey Mansfield

February 19, 2013

Stephen Gregory: How did you get to know Strauss?

Harvey Mansfield: That's what I was going begin with. [Laughter] I had to get to know him because I was not his student. I was at Harvard. I had this wonderful man, Samuel Beer,¹ who was my advisor both as an undergraduate and as a graduate student, a manly man who was confused in some of his thinking but really an inspiring teacher. And I was at Harvard, of which Strauss had a low opinion. The Harvard Government department was the headquarters of Carl Friedrich, Strauss's long-time companion, I think, in the *Gymnasium*. They knew each other, and Strauss once told me that Carl Friedrich came to America much too early. He was not a Jew and he came in the '20's [laughs], and Strauss intimated or I guess thought that this was because he couldn't get a decent professorship in Germany, which was of course much more desirable than having to go to America. In fact, he said that he met Friedrich in a library in Berlin and asked him how he was doing, and he says: "Well, I'm going to America to Harvard to be a professor." And he² nodded and said: "Very nice," and thought to himself: "Hmmp. America. He might as well be going to Burma." So that was Strauss on Harvard.

I got to know Strauss through Straussians, and that was first of all Harry Jaffa,³ who was an assistant professor in my father's department at Ohio State University. It was my father's department, I say, because he was the chairman of it and did most of the hiring. When my father came, the Ohio State department had never hired a black or a Jew, and my father took it upon himself to remedy both those lacks. He hired three Jews; one of them was Harry. And when Harry got there, he reminded my father that Harry had been an undergraduate at Yale, where my father was a professor during the 1930's, and that once Harry had come into my father's office and asked about what he thought the academic job prospects might be. And my father looked at him and said: "You're a Jew, you won't ever get a job." So it turned out otherwise.

So I met Harry that way, and Harry took it upon himself to tutor me, and he told me about his professor Strauss and about some of his own work, and we got to be quite close. I was in high school. This was I think 1948, '49, my senior year in Columbus, Ohio. So I got to be very good friends with him. And then I went off to Harvard; and when I graduated in 1953, that was the year that Strauss's *Natural Right and History* came out. And I remember reading that with very great interest and writing voluminous notes on this book. It seemed to me it was just what I was looking for. I was disgusted with liberal relativism and didn't think I believed in God or in kind

¹ Samuel H. Beer (d. 2009), scholar of British politics and American federalism.

² That is, Strauss.

³ Harry V. Jaffa: see "People."

of strict natural law; and this was right in between, so it avoided the inflexibility of natural law and the confusion of relativism while, I think, combining the insights (if that's what they were) of each of those two positions. Those were the two positions I knew about and was trying to decide between.

And then—I'm still talking about myself because I want to explain why or how I met or got to know Strauss—and then after I graduated from Harvard in 1953, got a B.A and I went to England for a year, studied at the LSE,⁴ and then had two years in the army, all the time becoming more conservative politically. I'd been a sort of a liberal democrat like my parents as a Harvard undergraduate. And remembering Strauss, and although I didn't really have much contact with Jaffa—and then when I went back to Harvard as a graduate student in 1956, I got to know two instructors there who were students of Strauss, [or] had been, Richard Cox and David Lowenthal.⁵ And I got quite close especially to David Lowenthal. We would meet together, usually at his house. When I told Strauss about this later, he asked me: "When you met to read books"—that's what we were doing—"was it at his house or yours?" I said mostly at his, so he was the senior partner. That was the implication of his question; he wanted to know. [Laughs]

And so I went to David, and he's a man of very sweet temper who was a wonderful friend and guide in my developing interest in Strauss. He never pushed Strauss in the way that Harry Jaffa did, but he did what Strauss wanted his students to do or did himself, which is to read great books with one another. So that's what we did. And then it was about 1960 that Robert Goldwin⁶, who was a student of Strauss and a managerial Straussian who ran many conferences—

SG: Right.

HM: He had money for I think it was the Public Affairs Conference, and he was partly funded by Senator Charles Percy of Illinois at that time, and I went to one of these conferences in Chicago. I forgot the subject of it [laughs]. He had a number of subjects. And he wrote seven or eight books that published articles of Straussians on questions of foreign policy, representation (I contributed to that one) and there were other subjects. He later went to AEI in Washington, American Enterprise Institute, and there continued his conferences and books of edited articles out of those conferences. But the one that he invited me to in Chicago was one of his early ones, and there Strauss was, himself. And so he didn't come to all of our sessions; in fact, I think he only went to one of them. And so I got to see him in action and I got to meet him. He had heard of me, I think, from David Lowenthal at Harvard. About that time, too, I got to meet Joseph

⁴ The London School of Economics and Political Science.

⁵ Richard Cox and David Lowenthal: see "People."

⁶ Robert Goldwin: see "People."

Cropsey⁷ and Allan Bloom.⁸ And Allan Bloom introduced me to Seth Benardete,⁹ who was at that time, or maybe it was a little later, a junior fellow at Harvard.

I would say parenthetically about Seth Benardete that he was the second most intelligent man I'd had ever met, Strauss being the first. And I used to have lunch with him. He was a junior fellow and he lived in Elliott House, one of the dormitory houses at Harvard to which I was also attached. I was a tutor there, and that's the designation they used. So we both had lunch at Elliott House and I would see him there, and there were some students who would come along, and those were memorable experiences. Benardete would open up about things he had discovered. But also he would just sit down with other professors or graduate students who were working on some subject and start asking them questions, and at the end of a minute or two, it became clear that Benardete was entering territory that they had never considered. So these were some of the most powerful minds that I had met. I was at Harvard then; there were good students there, intelligent people, but these were powerful minds around Strauss who had been attracted to him. And that was part of—certainly, definitely I would say part of my attraction to Strauss.

But I didn't really get to know Strauss until—nor to have much experience with him—until I went to Berkley in 1960 as an assistant professor at the University of California, where I stayed for two years. And that was in 1960 to 1962. And the first of those two years, 1960-61, I met Strauss because that was the year that he went to Palo Alto and studied or worked at the Institute for Advanced Research and Behavioral Studies, something like that title. In other words, he was in the lair of one of the headquarters of the social scientists whom he so heavily criticized and, I have to say, rather despised. But they had invited him, and he said: Yes, on condition you invite several other people, some students of mine that I can take with me so that I won't be by myself.

So I went to a reading group that Strauss held. There in that group was Ralph Lerner,¹⁰ and Martin Diamond,¹¹ and Hilail Gilden,¹² and somebody whose last name was Black, whom I gave employment to as a teaching assistant. I can't remember his first name. He had been a kind of student of Strauss. He was a Jew whose name was Blank but he changed it to Black. And every time he came, Strauss always referred to him as Blank. [Laughs] So there may have been one or two others in this reading group, but this is all I could call to mind. This took place on Wednesdays at 8 p.m. in his house.

So I had a tough day on Wednesday. I had two classes to teach, a lecture in the morning and my seminar in the afternoon. This was the seminar on Burke. It was the first seminar I ever taught, and it ran from four to six. So I had from six o'clock to jump in my car and drive to Palo Alto,

⁷ Joseph Cropsey: see "People."

⁸ Allan Bloom: see "People."

⁹ Seth Benardete: see "People."

¹⁰ Ralph Lerner: see "People."

¹¹ Martin Diamond: see "People."

¹² Hilail Gildin: see "People."

which was over an hour's drive in those days—it was the Bay Bridge you had to take—wolfing down a sandwich as I was driving. And I arrived, and there was Strauss with this reading group. This was the year when he was writing his book on Socrates and Aristophanes,¹³ so we read some plays of Aristophanes. I remember the first one that we started with was the *Acharnians*. We also read Plato's *Laches*, and a couple of other plays by Aristophanes. He would start at 8 p.m. and he would stop at twelve, and that was early because he'd had a heart attack the year before, and Mrs. Strauss told him he had to stop at 12. But that was not the end of the evening, because it went on for another hour or so for gossip and refreshments. So wine would be brought in and cold meats, usually, to eat. And Strauss would discourse on his readings, and what he'd seen in the news, and various conceits that he had. He liked to play games. So he had a list of political scientists who had the same last name as American politicians or philosophers: he was trying to show the parallel between philosophers and politics. So there was Tom Dewey and John Dewey, I remember that first among other things. [Laughs]

Another one of his conceits was—this was the time when the United States was of course dealing with the Soviet Union, and the liberals at that time were always saying we have to negotiate. And to negotiate you have to show good faith, which meant you would make a preliminary concession to the other side to show that you were negotiating in good faith, and then they would come to you and you would proceed then from that. So Strauss had this conceit for a preliminary concession that the United States might make to the Soviet Union, which was to pronounce all proper names in German that began with “h” in the Russian manner, which is “guh.” So Hitler would become Ghitler and Hegel would become Ghegel. [Laughs] And so he played with this for a while with us, referring to Gilden as Ghilail and things like that. Gharvey, I was. So he had this jokey way. And then, it was about one o'clock or a little after that I got in my car and had to drive all the way back to Berkeley where I arrived pretty tired.

But the sessions were just—I mean, the first one my jaw just dropped. It was something that I had read, and he just saw so much more than I, and went so fast. It took all my powers to keep up or even try to keep up with his mind. He would sometimes stop and ask us questions, or once in a while, I remember, asking—ask me, directly, questions. And he was holding a pencil and tapping on the desk, that's all I remembered, telling me that time was passing and I was—it was up to me to come up with something. [Laughs] So I hadn't had this experience before but it was something. That, you could say, that was when I became a Straussian.

SG: Okay.

HM: Just getting the full measure, I mean my full measure of his mind. So it was what I'd gotten. So that was my year with him in one these weekly meetings which were very close. I can't say that I was close to him like one of his students. In fact, he would sometimes treat me with mock equality, because usually the other people in the room were all students of his,

¹³ *Socrates and Aristophanes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966, 1980).

whereas I was as it were an invited colleague because, after all, we both had Ph.Ds. [Laughs] He would ask me in such a way as I said [that] gave me an imaginary elevation above the others in this room who were all merely his minions or tools. He would also often treat me as—because I was the only Protestant or person of Protestant background in the room often being a mix of Jews and Catholics, usually. I became the expert on Protestantism. So he would look at me and say: Mr. Mansfield will tell us what Luther had to say on this subject [laughs], [of] which I knew nothing, but of course he would then supply it because he knew. So that was the Stanford thing.

And then there's later on, which was from '61 'til twelve years until he died in 1973. I had some correspondence with him. I have about eight of his letters, which I need to give to the Chicago collection. And he liked my first book, which I showed to him and he read it. He told—this is what I heard from hearsay—he told Robert Goldwin, whom he met on the street after finishing reading it, he said: I've just read a book which I wished I had written. This was an unbelievable compliment, which he never delivered to me directly [laughs], but Goldwin of course relayed it. He did write me a letter about my book, in which he did not say this but made a couple of criticisms, but indicated that he liked it; and there were also a couple of good passages which he praised me for. But otherwise, the letters were not long or really detailed like his exchanges with Benardete, for example, or others.

Then close to the end of his life, in Annapolis, I went down to see him with Bob Faulkner¹⁴ from Boston College. He knew he was waning, fading and so he wanted to see his friends and his students before he died, and there was somebody who had given money to pay for the expenses of travel to make this happen. So I was there with Robert Faulkner. And we arrived sort of mid-morning and talked until lunchtime. And then he said: Well, you'll have to go out and find lunch for yourself because I can't make it for you. He said: I'm not sure I would know how to boil an egg. [Laughs] And both Bob and I had the same thought running through our minds: Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a lunch of a boiled egg made by Leo Strauss. [Laughs] But he didn't follow through even on that, on that suggestion.

And at this meeting, Bob's wife Margie took a photo of him which has appeared on a couple of book covers since then, in which I appear as a sort of ghostly figure over one of his shoulders, and he is sitting in a white shirt with some money in his pocket that was intended to pay the cleaning lady when she came. And he said: If it isn't in my pocket where everybody can see it, I won't remember to give it to her. And the photo has sometimes been retouched to remove the money, and perhaps also to remove my face, my grinning, Machiavellian face in the dark of the background.

I was working on Machiavelli by then and he was interested in that. But he told me that he would read my book when it came out, "If I have time." He said it, if he, Strauss: If I had time. And it turned out he didn't. And my Machiavelli book wasn't published until 1978 or so, five years

¹⁴ Robert Faulkner: see "People."

after he had gone. But only someone who has worked in Machiavelli—I have a little—can appreciate just how far he went, and every time I reread the *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, I find more, sometimes much more, that I overlooked before. I think that was his book which he wrote to show his students how to read esoterically—his students and others who wanted to become his students how to read esoterically. It has some esoteric writing by himself, Strauss sort of copying or imitating Machiavelli. But if you wanted a book which would disclose to you bit by bit, with a lot of hard work and insight on your own part required, that is I think his most successful and most deliberately intended teaching experience.

What else? Oh, there was one other joke about an encounter I had with his great friend Jacob Klein¹⁵ at Annapolis. I invited Klein to give a talk at the American Political Science Association meeting, which was in Washington that year, which was an easy drive for him from Annapolis. And he gave the talk which was on *logos* in Plato, which is one of his articles; you can find it in his collected articles. But in accepting his invitation, he wrote—this is all by mail—he wrote to ask whether there would not be an honorarium involved. And so I got it into my head to write a rather impudent response, because it was really a naive question because a professional conference or meeting never pays honoraria. Still. So I said there's no honorarium for the occasion, and you will have to look on it as an opportunity to advance your career. [Laughs] He was a man of 70 at the time; his career was pretty well advanced. So apparently (I never heard directly from him) he got upset at this and asked Goldwin who the head guy was, and also told his friend Strauss about it. So one of the times I called up Strauss at Annapolis, as soon as he recognized my voice he didn't even say hello, and he says: Oh, that was such a wonderful letter you sent to Mr. Klein. [Laughs] He loved it that I'd pulled his leg a little.

So really that's what I have to offer.

SG: When—in the reading group, how did Strauss conduct that? In his courses—you may have seen some of the transcripts of his courses—he often would begin the courses with kind of a general statement about the problem most generally, and why one needed to read that particular book. And once the course began going, he would have someone read passages, he would comment on them, and take questions.

HM: No, it was not like that. He would not make a general introductory statement. I don't recall whether he had one of us read the passages, but he would have read them already but he wanted to go over them with us. And so as compared to the Strauss transcripts, it was much less lecturing and much more questioning of us. And he wanted to see whether we could see what he had seen, or had some comment to make that he might have missed or that would at least start something going in his mind that he hadn't seen. So it was, as they say, bouncing his ideas off of us. And once in a while we would get praised for seeing things. I don't think I ever got praised. [Laughs] But it was more intimate and more himself, less formal and closer to his mind.

¹⁵ Jacob Klein: see "People."

SG: What impressed you about these sessions beyond just his sheer intelligence?

HM: The rapidity of his thought and how quickly he worked. He was writing his book all this time; we didn't know this or at least there was no evidence. He wouldn't show us parts of it. But I think [he would] just go over what he had seen, is what I would guess now, looking back and seeing whether we could follow. That would help him to see how much it was necessary for him to disclose of his thinking; and what we thought of it or, you know, how difficult we had found it. So I think we helped him, or at least he thought we might help him to gauge his audience.

SG: How did that circle of students seem to you? I mean, did you have the sense you were entering a group, or was it just a series of friends you'd acquired?

HM: No. There was a group. There were leaders. I could see Cropsey was a leader, and Bloom. Benardete was off by himself. He had friends, but he didn't develop students until later. And he was never a brilliant lecturer, brilliant though he was. But he was not as good at condescending as some of the others. So it was definitely a group, and they were beginning to attract attention, adverse attention. So there was not a sense of being embattled, but still the sense of being definitely marked out as his. It's clear that Strauss wanted to start a school of thought, that he discovered something which he thought needed to be protected.

SG: Could you elaborate on that just a bit? What do you think Strauss had in mind, wanting to start a school? What was he aiming at?

HM: A revival of philosophy. He saw that philosophy was in danger of being abandoned, really; losing its strength, its power to impress, or convince, or attract; becoming something academic, merely academic. So he wanted to do this. He could see, I think, that the world would not accept very much of what he said, and it was obvious that—I once heard him remark that he had convinced only one or two people his age. It was only the young that he could attract. There was Wilmoore Kendall,¹⁶ who was his age [laughs]; and one or two others were impressed by him, like Edward Banfield,¹⁷ but they weren't going to change their lives and become political philosophers. Everybody that was close to his age had something invested in the way he thought and wrote as things were. So he knew therefore that it was going to be difficult to sustain a succession to his insights, which it was kind of paradoxical that he was the one who rediscovered the distinction between esoteric and exoteric writing. And he broadcast it to the world [laughs], but the world refused to listen despite what you might think is the attraction of learning something secret.

And reading mystery stories—which, by the way, he loved to read. Why do people like mystery stories? Because they're interested in mysteries. And now you learn that the greatest writers wrote mysteries, which they also had solutions for. And yet not only do you reject this and

¹⁶ Wilmoore Kendall: see "People."

¹⁷ Edward Banfield: see "People."

ignore this, but you attack the people who think like that. There was plenty of evidence already in his lifetime for him to conclude that this was going to take not an organization, but a group. He would have to sustain it, and that meant working with closely and spending a lot of time with people who were much beneath his intelligence and who were able to show him moral qualities like loyalty but not be friends of his at the highest level in that way.

I forgot one thing about my father and Leo Strauss. My father was a professor of political science at Ohio State and he ended up his career at Columbia. While he was at Ohio State, he was the editor of the *American Political Science Review*. And while he was an editor—this was also because he knew that I was interested in Strauss—he published two articles of Strauss’s on John Locke and was very impressed by them. And he met Strauss, who was impressed that the editor of the *APSR* would have done this. And so that was a kind of a beginning or part of a friendship that he had for me, what my father did. My father was the editor of *APSR* for ten years, and I have on my shelf those copies, of which I am inordinately proud: not only do they include two articles by Leo Strauss, but they include a lot of very well-written and still interesting articles on American politics and other politics too. I think they stand as a kind of reproach to the political science profession and to the *APSR* itself for what both of them have fallen to.

But one thing my father also published was a critique of Strauss by Sheldon Wolin and John Shaar¹⁸ of Berkeley. This was published just in, about I think in 1960, just before I arrived at Berkeley myself. [Laughs] And they criticized him mainly not so much for his views on philosophy or political philosophy but for his attack on social science, which he and Herbert Storing, I guess—I can’t remember who edited the volume of essays of Strauss’s students on various of the chief political scientists and social scientists of the time, like Laswell and Arthur Bentley¹⁹ and—²⁰

SG: And where Strauss published his Epilogue.

HM: And where Strauss published an Epilogue, yah. And so this was an attack on the Epilogue by these two left-wing political theorists who really shared much of Strauss’s disdain for behavioralism but were taking political advantage of the fact that they could make him unpopular with the profession as a whole, they thought, by attacking this aspect of his teaching or concentrating on this aspect. So—and Strauss didn’t answer himself, but my father published an answer from Joe Cropsey.²¹

¹⁸ John H. Scharr and Sheldon Wolin, “Review of *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, ed. Herbert J. Storing,” *American Political Science Review* 57 (1963): 125-50.

¹⁹ Harold Lasswell (d. 1978), author of *Politics: Who Gets What, When and How* (1936); Arthur Bentley (d. 1957), author of *The Process of Government* (1908).

²⁰ *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, ed. Herbert J. Storing (1952).

²¹ Joseph Cropsey, “A Reply to Rothman,” *American Political Science Review* 56 (1962): 353-59, written in response to Stanley Rothman, “The Revival of Classical Political Philosophy: A

And then there was another thing that he published, a critique from Stanley Rothman,²² who was a Harvard Ph.D. and I think also came to the defense of behavioralism or behavioral methodology and political science. Stanley Rothman then later on in life became a professor at Smith College. And I got to know him, and he changed his political views to become conservative and his views on political science altogether to rue the article that he had written critical of Strauss many, many years ago.

SG: That seems very unusual.

HM: It is unusual and should be remembered to his credit.

SG: Do you think Strauss thought that he had succeeded in establishing a school?

HM: I don't know [laughs], but I think he did. I think he had reason to conclude that he had succeeded.

SG: During his lifetime, I mean, when you and others began to sense that students of Strauss were marked, I suppose around that time that the word *Straussianism* entered the language. Do you think that Strauss was comfortable with there being a *Straussianism*?

HM: No, he wasn't and that—

SG: Did he comment on that to you?

HM: No. But I remember Cropsey's written remarks somewhere that there's such a thing as a *Straussian* but there is no such thing as a *Straussianism*. And that's certainly true if you compare him with the other conservative political theorists of his time, say, Michael Oakeshott and Eric Voegelin. They had followers too, and they still do; but those followers spent all their time analyzing Voegelin's work or Oakeshott's work, whereas Strauss had his students study the great authors that he himself studied. More recently, of course, *Straussians* have started to write on Strauss, and that's not bad, even though I don't think Strauss wanted it to happen, at least in his lifetime. Strauss's books are so well worth reading. One can forget that. You can read them once and be very impressed, but if you go back again, you'll find still more. I mention that this has always been my experience with *Thoughts on Machiavelli*.

SG: Do you think Strauss was comfortable with the word *Straussian*?

HM: I remember once his saying that. And yes, I think he was [laughs], though he was amused by it. That was a sign of success.

Critique," *American Political Science Review* 56 (1962): 341-52. See also, Rothman, "A Rejoinder to Cropsey," *American Political Science Review* 56 (1962): 682-86.

²² Stanley Rothman (d. 2011), professor of Government at Smith College.

SG: Through much of your career you have been labeled as a Straussian. And what are the costs, if any, in carrying, or the advantages in carrying a label around like that with you like that? And do you resent having a label, or having a label assigned to you as though that somehow explains something about you?

HM: No, I don't resent it, I'm proud of that. It does have costs, that's for sure. Yeah, you get something of the same silent treatment that Strauss gets: being ignored and never cited, not put in bibliographies. But I've lived down at least some of that, and in some ways the profession of political science has become more tolerant of Strauss. One sees this in certain things. It used to be that Straussians could publish only in Cornell Press and Chicago Press. Now they publish pretty generally in all the university presses. The trouble never arose from the presses; it arose from the reviewers or referees to whom they appealed when judging manuscripts by Straussian authors. But as soon as it was discovered that this was the case, and that there were biased referees and that to an editor removed from the fray these looked like readable, interesting, and intelligent books, then they started to look for more favorable reviewers and to realize that this is the kind of manuscript that's going to get flak. So one had to take that into account. And so that situation has improved very much.

And there are also more people who are not Straussians who are willing to listen to Straussians or even invite them. I do a lot of lecturing, and I've been a professor for a long time. And of all of the lectures I'm invited to give, I would say that only three or four—and those actually more recent—were by liberals who genuinely wanted to hear the other side. One of them is George Kateb at Princeton; another was John Dunn at Cambridge. And this, despite the fact that I have invited many of them. So this is not only sort of getting the cold shoulder, but receiving a certain ingratitude or lack of mutuality. So that's been my experience, and that's one of the costs. But as I say, I think that's getting better, and just through time or routinization Straussians are known and recognized. For example, I am on the editorial board of *Political Theory*. They published one article of mine and they don't very often publish Straussians, though they do. So there's a certain recognition there.

Also conservatives have seen that Straussians are their friends, up to a point—not on every issue and not every Straussian, as of course there are Straussians who vote Democratic. And to be a Straussian is certainly different—I would say far above—being a conservative. [Laughs] But it's not quite a political alliance; I think Strauss once said his students have an odor of conservatism about them. And so I think that's helped. And it's certainly gotten funding for this Program on Constitutional Government that I've had since 1985 at Harvard, which has invited sort of other Straussians, but also liberals and conservatives to come and try to do some small thing to bring, or to puncture the political correctness of Harvard. Also I think Bill Kristol has had an influence. He's very prominent in Republican politics. He runs a magazine²³ that's

²³ *The Weekly Standard*.

been very successful in influencing conservative opinion, and he's both a conservative and a Straussian.

SG: I suspect that one reaction to Bill Kristol's influence is the attribution to Leo Strauss of responsibility for the Iraq War.

HM: That's right, that's right.

SG: I'm not sure that he wants to own to that.

HM: No, that's right. [Laughs] But that goes with the territory. Bill himself never says: It was because I was a Straussian that I wanted the war in Iraq. It is strange, or interesting, at any rate, that the phrase "regime change" came into American politics; and that's definitely a concern of Straussians, the regime. In fact, if there is one thing that Strauss could teach to an ordinary political scientist without his having to accept any of the other baggage that goes along with being a Straussian, it would be the notion of the regime.

SG: No one believes in the political science that Strauss attacked, yet—and that seems to be the origin of this animus against him, yet the animus lingers. What is motivating liberals and others to, to—

HM: Well, still the fundamental principles are there. So yes, behavioralism is not as strong as it was, but rational choice or public choice theories have most of the same faults that Strauss attacked: the fact-value distinction. Strauss began a number of his courses, the introductory remarks in his courses that you mentioned, by attacking the fact-value distinction. For the most part, however, that's still alive even though modern philosophers or contemporary philosophers have begun to reject it. Quine²⁴ wrote some devastating, made some devastating remarks about it. And a recent book came out by Hilary Putnam, [a] philosopher at Harvard, [in] 2005 I think, with the title: *The Collapse of the Fact-Value Distinction*.²⁵

SG: After you left Stanford, did you and Strauss talk from time to time?

HM: Occasionally, but no, I never spoke to him on the phone the way—and so I didn't have the long conversations that Bloom had, for example, Allan Bloom, and others. I was shy and I still am, but I was in awe and still am. So I wasn't sure I deserved to—and he knew that, so he would reach out to me sometimes. I did call him several times towards the end of his life when he was at Annapolis.

SG: I see. In the sessions in the reading group, after the session on Aristophanes was over and the talk became more casual, did Strauss talk about politics?

²⁴ Willard van Orman Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (1953).

²⁵ Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

HM: Oh, yes.

SG: How would you describe his politics?

HM: Conservative. Very, quite conservative Republican. Mostly motivated by the communist issue and the Cold War with the Soviet Union. He did not get excited about the welfare state or the Great Society of LBJ, only remarking as I recall on the use of greatness in that phrase. Great: that even liberalism had some appreciation for greatness.

SG: In our conversation this afternoon, there are a number of instances of friendship [that] come up. In a way, you found your way to Strauss through friends, and at the end of his life he cared to bring you to him.

HM: Yeah.

SG: To have a chance to see you again. Does this seem unusual in academics to you, to have groups of friends like this?

HM: Oh, yes.

SG: How do you account for it?

HM: It's not unknown. I had something similar from Sam Beer who, as I said, was my professor and lived much longer: he lived into his mid-90's and so died only fairly recently, and he was very friendly. He would say things, and made a remark I treasure: that I was his favorite student. I don't know how many people he told that. [Laughs] So it's not unknown in other ways. Professors do become sentimental about their students. They're sort of children, your children in a way. Machiavelli actually gives us that expression: your natural children are the ones, the children of your mind as opposed to the children of your body. [Laughs] So there's basis for it. But [pause] I don't know. He did have this tender concern. He had a great sense of tact, but he knew that not every situation can be controlled by tact or ought to be.

SG: Right.

HM: So sometimes one should be tough and show one's animosity, if always in a suave way—which he did, so he set an example in that way to his students. The right amount of candor.

SG: I see. Were the friendships that grew up around Strauss, was this a reflection of his own spirit somehow, that somehow that this is something that he needed? Was it part of his activity—the conversations, the reading group—was that somehow something that was naturally conducive to developing friendships? I mean, maybe all of the above?

HM: Yes, I guess all of the above. The fact that he was making a school gave him a motive for forming and maintaining friendships among people in his own time, in his own lifetime. Here again, I make a comparison with Machiavelli. Machiavelli wrote a famous letter in 1513 in

which he just drops by the way the remark that he'd just written this little thing called—whimsical thing called *The Prince*. But he gives a kind of account of a day in his life. This is in response to a friend of his who was then in Rome and had just sent him a letter giving him a day in *his* life in Rome, so kind of as to trump this or to match this. And that life was divided between the vulgar—he used that expression—and himself. So he spent the day with the vulgar, playing games, and gambling, and shouting at them, discussing. And then he said he would—at the end of the day, he would go to his study and he imagined—he would dress himself in courtly robes and sit down to the food that is mine alone. So that was how he presented himself. No, there was another class of persons, like the person, Vittori, to which he was writing, or Guicciardini²⁶, and others of his time that would have been, I suppose, above the vulgar, though by no means at his level. But still, that you could see the distinction in his mind: it was between those who understood him and those would all be after he died, and everyone else. So Strauss had this kind of middle group. It was partly that of course Strauss was opening himself to—by disclosing his rediscovery of esoteric writing, by doing that he was bringing everyone that is in the profession closer to the great philosophers than ever before, maybe. This was something he thought he had to expound. He must have been glad to decide that it was good to tell his secret. He would have the pleasure of disclosing things that Machiavelli didn't disclose but only practiced, leaving such a few remarks like: Every day I tell so many lies, he said in a letter once: Every day I tell so many lies I hardly know which is the truth. So with his historical situation, one could say that gave him the basis for making a school more readily perhaps than somebody like Machiavelli, who had to conceal everything and did so.

SG: Before we end, why are you so sure that Strauss wanted to make a school? What's the basis for that?

HM: Well, I think there was some policy behind his love of friendship, and he liked to hear about all of us and he liked us to interact with each other, so to be aware and meet each other. It seemed deliberate [laughs] as well as just unfeigned attraction on his part.

SG: I see. When you look back on Strauss now, how does he strike you? I mean, you've been talking about your impressions of him when you knew him, but now it's forty years since he's died. When you look back, how do you think of him?

HM: Oh, as one of the greats. As the outstanding philosopher of our time. And in the company of those he studied and wrote about. No less.

SG: Okay.

HM: Once I introduced him at Berkeley when I was very young. And I called him a philosopher, and when he took the podium, he rejected that. But I think that was political on his part.

²⁶ Francesco Guicciardini (d. 1540), Italian historian.

SG: He rejected it throughout his life—

HM: Yes.

SG: Not just with you at Berkeley.

HM: Yes.

SG: But you think he knew differently?

HM: I think, yeah.

SG: Anything else you'd like to add?

HM: At the moment, that's it, I think.

SG: All right. Well, thank you very much.