Interview with Roger Masters

November 15, 2017[1]

Gayle McKeen: This is Gayle McKeen here with Roger Masters. And he is going to start talking about Leo Strauss.

Roger Masters: My history is I grew up in Greater Boston, I went to Newton High School, one of the best, it was like going to a prep school. And then I went to Harvard. My father had gone to Harvard, I was straight A at Newton, and so the first place I applied was Harvard. I had no trouble getting in. And I found Harvard very congenial. As a freshman, I got to know the master of Adams House a little bit in a class, so I applied for Adams House where he was the master of the house. And the reason is that he was interested in teaching, the politics of the Sherman Antitrust Act. And when I was a freshman, I took a course with an economist named Carl Kaysen, who ended up on the Council of Economic Advisors, really tough, smart guy. Palamountain was smart, too, but he wasn't tough and aggressive the way Carl was. And I had those two who were my advisors for a thesis on economic theory and the Sherman Antitrust Act. I wanted to connect the economics of it and the politics of it; that is, that I realized is, [as] you'll see throughout my career, is that connecting different things has always been the critical thing in my research. And that book, *101 Top Industry Experts*, I'm the first person with executive spotlights for that reason, because it is very rare that academics do this. But it's core to all of my work, and of course now in the last, particularly since my retirement, and the last book's just before I retired, I've specialized in the new field, I had something to do with creating it, called biology and politics. And I can tell you that most academics are scared terribly by that kind of work.

GM: This is different from sociobiology, which was a popular field in what, the 1970's and 1980's?

RM: Oh no, no, it's not different from sociobiology.

GM: It's not different. Okay.

RM: No, no, no. No, I'll get to that in just a second, because the first thing is that the whole issue of introducing biological things in political science has been a matter of fear. And most recently, one of the things I picked up on to try and get the political scientists to pay attention was decoding the human genome. We know it now costs a lot of money, but every gene in an individual can be decoded, and we know that the price of a technology always falls. So we can predict whether it's ten or twenty years, but I think it'll be closer to ten or less, it will cost something like a hundred dollars to decode a whole genome. And at that point, every infant's genome will be decoded immediately, because it has such a huge effect in healthcare and it saves so much money in healthcare. Then there's a new question. Who owns your genes? How can this information be used?

[1] This is a transcript of the audiofile of the interview. A second version of the interview, revised by Roger Masters, begins after the conclusion of this transcript, on page 23.

The people who are going to have to decide that are political scientists. And I once made a suggestion to that effect in a conversation on a street corner. And I was overheard by several people, and one member of the department who's a specialist in French politics and I think was always suspicious of me because I spent a lot of time in France and I never questioned this person's work at all, I thought that was not my business, and the key thing was this member filed a formal complaint against me—the rules in the college for a formal complaint: if it's going to be pursued, it has to be written; the person who is being complained about by one faculty member has to be informed, and if there is a hearing or a meeting in the dean's office about this, you have to be warned in advance so you bring a lawyer with you or somebody else. Well, as it turned out, I got a call: Could I be in the dean's office at such and such a time and place? I had no idea why I was being called there, none. I walk into the office and here's a proud professor from my department sitting there. Why, why is that?

GM: Not the dominant male.

RM: Most decidedly not, partly because it was not the same, that gender. But anyway, the dean said: This professor has filed a complaint against you. And so this woman said the whole problem was that I was trying to change how everybody taught, trying to change how she taught, this was outrageous, and she went on for a while about how I was trying to change everything by this stuff about biology. And there was one other thing she wanted to complain about. I used the word "fuck."

GM: In the conversation that she overheard on the street, or in another context?

RM: She didn't say when or where.

GM: Oh, she didn't.

RM: All of this had to do with things that my—either speech or writing, it all had to do with the First Amendment. Every bit of it. And I'm listening to this, and I'm saying: Well, I can attack this but I'm not going to waste my time. It'll take me at least a half a year, and what's more, if I don't get this reversed—she was going on and on—if I don't get this reversed, I'll just report the whole thing. If the dean sides with her (I think I thought about this after the dean sided with her), if they maintain this by sending me to a committee and the committee insists on the punishments the dean talked about, I would just take this whole case to the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment of the Humanities and the newspapers, and say Dartmouth College should not get any grants because they are restricting the freedom of speech. It's just outrageous, it should never happen, even if that was only one case. I said, how can I do that? The college had been nice to me. This particular professor, who's scared to death that somebody would ask her that knows something about this field, and she's just scared by it, and the dean, who is scared by the professor. He was sort of a coward. Well, I'm not going to let them foul up my life. I don't have to spend time with people. So I said to the dean: Look, if you don't want me around here, I don't like to talk to people who don't want me. I didn't say: I'm very famous, you know, you're a fool. I just said: Oh, sorry, I don't care.

GM: And that was the end of it?

RM: So what the punishment was, that I could no longer apply for a grant through the college. This was 2015. I retired in 1997. But I—

GM: There was no formal hearing?

RM: This was the only hearing.

GM: No other evidence brought forward?

RM: It was a complete violation of the rules. Complete violation of the rules. If I had brought the charge, the charge would be that the college had—I would charge him with behavior inconsistent with both the First Amendment and the faculty handbook, and he should, all relationship between Dartmouth College and the professor and the dean should be immediately severed, irrevocably. They were no longer related to the college. Period. Leave their offices. But I said I'm not going to do that. It's a waste of time. You don't waste your time with mediocre people.

GM: So back to your personal history at that time.

RM: Well, one of the things, during this thing I said, well, [to] Michael Masters, I said: Mike, you say I can't apply for a grant. Do you realize that after I retired, one of the things I did was I was the lead investigator in a consulting contract with the Department of Defense for nine years that brought in this enormous amount of money in direct costs. Does that matter? No. I said: Well, I think the president might be interested in that. Certainly the Board of Trustees would, perhaps. It's clear that he has decided that he wants to get rid of me, and I have no reason to waste any time with these people at all. And I will, at some point in my career, or in something after I'm dead, refer to this as an example of the hostility of social sciences to anything that is interdisciplinary and that to do with biology at a time when that's absolutely essential to study and shouldn't be shunted off someplace, and these people are simply impossible because they're so scared.

GM: Why do you think they're frightened?

RM: Well, it's very easy, because academia is territorial and territorial behavior is characteristic of all non-human primates. So that's monkey behavior, okay? Or monkey business. Why? Human groups are characterized by having boundaries, inside the group and outside the group. We have a lot of mysticism about all men are created equal and that includes foreigners and domestics and so forth, but this is not the way organizations work. Now human groups definitely have permeability, though. Some groups have absolutely no possible entry or exit, and those are, for example, they're not monkey groups, or ape groups, because there is some permeability in those groups, especially departure. But the terrorist cell is a sample of that, but that's not exactly the way we want to organize the world. And in particular, one of the issues is [that] alliances between groups are like alliances between individuals. That is, individuals form alliances. Now some are very solitary, and if you're solitary and you're at the margin of a group and you're not threatening the group, you can be tolerated. One of the things about groups, for example, is since they're hunters and gatherers originally, you have to have a number of things. First of all, you have to be able to search out where there are the fruits on the trees and where they've all been eaten; so some people have to go out and search around. Secondly, you need a leader who is the center of attention, so when he runs somewhere,

somebody else follows him. There was a wonderful thing in the Vietnam film last night, I don't know if you know that series.

GM: Oh, the Ken Burns one?

RM: The Ken Burns one.

GM: I haven't watched any of it.

RM: Oh, it's been terrific. But there's a scene where they're talking to an officer, and he describes the scene where there's a hill that he realizes they've got to take because the Viet Cong occupy the top of it, and they're shooting down the hill like ducks in a, you know, in a row. So they decide to run up the hill, and he says well, he's just going to do some—what is it called? Well, he's going to do some advanced scouting. And so he starts up the hill and suddenly realizes his whole unit is following him up the hill. And before he knows it, he's captured the hill. [Laughs] He's captured the hill because the defenders at the top are completely flabbergasted. They didn't expect these people running up the hill with guns and started shooting at them with accuracy. Well, partly because they were more afraid of fighting them than our troops. And one of the things this commanding officer said, he said it's amazing how when you're fighting, you think that war is scary, but he said there's a moment when it's just exhilarating. And that exhilaration of running up the hill, we don't realize that that's the complexities of humans, and that has to do with this emotion and cognition and stuff like that.

GM: Right.

RM: I want to get back to my career.

GM: Yes, please.

RM: Because this is going to be very important for you. You're just getting some idea of the particularity of how I think. After I graduated from Harvard summa cum laude at that time there was the draft. I graduated from high school in '51.

GM: So the Korean War.

RM: Graduated from Harvard in '55. But in '51, I could have been drafted right out of high school, but I applied for the deferment to go to college. You'd get that. However, draft boards usually didn't allow you another deferment for graduate school, so after—and I realized that in any event, even if they would, I wanted to get it out of the way, because after graduate school I wanted to be able to go on with my career. So I thought we were at peace at the moment, this is the time to go in the army. I went to Fort Dix, New Jersey, got trained as an intermediate speed radio operator. Now this was a—

GM: Intermediate speed? Is that what you said?

RM: Intermediate speed. That is, Morse code. How to do Morse code, and there's a very rapid speed which is very hard to do, which is for big, long messages back to headquarters or whatever, but there are not many people who do that. A lot of people can do Morse code very slowly, but intermediate speed you have to do pretty good. I was assigned to an artillery [battalion], and that was what I was supposed to learn how to do, but what those people do in that particular specialty—in a war that was a lovely thing to

do. You had one person in every unit who would go out beyond the enemy lines to radio back with Morse code where the enemy targets were. And then there was somebody at the other end who decoded the message. But half the time you were going out behind enemy lines. That was a nice, safe job. [Laughs] When we were at peace it was no problem. I got assigned to an antiaircraft battalion in El Paso, Texas. I get to El Paso, Texas, there aren't any antiaircraft grounds. Fort Bliss, Texas has just been opened; they got to get a lot of people there because that's why they expanded this base hugely. I got an office in a nice, air-conditioned cinderblock building that's brand new, with nothing to do. Now a unit with nothing to do the only thing that happens is that the First Sergeant and commanding officer has them dig ditches and then fill them in. And I realized this the first weekend I'm there. And it didn't take very long to see what was going on at this place, and I walk into the orderly room, into the office, and there's the First Sergeant, a great big hefty guy with 30, 40, 35 years in the army, Henry Somoka. He's at a black Royal typewriter. So Masters takes one look and says—you're not supposed to volunteer in the army—and Masters says well and good: Hey, Sarge, I can type. So I ended up being clerk typist.

And because I saw how things laid with the commanding officer, [who] was sort of a playboy, and the first sergeant was a career soldier but he certainly wasn't a bureaucrat. Whenever they did anything that had to do with rules, I would just look up the rules in the army regulations. Well, that was a very valuable . . . I didn't have to do any KP or anything. I took a weekend off. By that time, I was married. We lived off post, you know. The army for me was a wonderful way of learning about bureaucracy.

And then I went to Chicago. I had no idea what I was going to study, for sure.

GM: Had someone told you about Chicago and encouraged you to apply there? How was it that you—

RM: This was my situation. I graduated from Harvard summa cum laude. My work was on the connection between economic theory and the antitrust policies. So I figured I would do something that was on this kind of new areas where politics had to deal with things that would obviously be relevant in the United States. And so the first year, the first summer, I take some courses and I remember somebody, and I even forget his name now, who was interested in international relations, and I thought he was pretty interesting. He seemed to be sort of knowledgeable. He was using systems theory, well, that was kind of interesting. After a little more reflection, I think all it was, was a model, a box, input-output feedback. It was so simple it was ridiculous. And meanwhile, in the fall term I took a political theory course because I had to do that. And that course was not with Strauss, but I had some interaction with Strauss, and I knew he was really fascinating, I was going to take a course with him. And after one course with Strauss, there's only one thing I was going to study: political philosophy. No question about it.

GM: And was this in the late 1950's or early 60's?

RM: I graduated from Harvard in 1955, started my graduate studies in the fall of, was it the fall or the summer? I think it was the summer. But anyway, whenever it was, in '57, and graduated in '61. But Strauss mesmerized me. Now here's this little man, he's soft spoken; he talks, he doesn't lecture. The first thing he taught us was how to read. I never

had to have anybody teach me how to read. But he made a simple point, I think two levels of reading. One is the superficial level; that anybody can read, and I don't think he stressed [it] very much, but he did make it clear, you know. The first thing is that at that level, there are all the people who are looking for subversives. Now, that is, the police read that kind of level; it's the other level, of the serious people who understand more deeply that there's another level of meaning which you don't want everybody to understand because it's too hard for them to understand. And the great writers always have those two levels, and if you want to study political philosophy, you have to study both. You cannot read fast. This seemed to me eminently sensible.

GM: It's remarkable that everyone who has been interviewed by either me or my predecessor has said very similar things. Yes.

RM: Well, it was the admissions key to a course. Because if you couldn't do that, you couldn't pass the course.

GM: Right.

RM: It's very simple, 'cause you wouldn't understand anything, and all it took me was to say: Oh God, yes. First the ancients—I mean, the whole point of Socrates and Plato was what happened to Socrates by talking about, the asking questions and people didn't like it. And all you got to do is to look at politics and realize that there's some things that; Joe McCarthy I think was in power at that time. If you didn't understand what Strauss was talking about after you read about Joe McCarthy, then you might as well be a truck driver. But it was so exciting to discover this. You have no idea. Nothing else mattered to me at that point. I mean I was married and my wife Judith had been a French major. We'd been in El Paso, Texas; I got married in the middle of my two years in the army. That was great because I could live off the post. But I'm trying to remember. She did something that [term], I don't know what, because we came back and then I went to Chicago after the army and we lived off post, and I think then, again, I don't remember what she, she did something, but it wasn't until I started teaching at Yale that she went to Columbia School of Social Work and began as a social worker. I think she did some teaching in Chicago or something like that. We lived not far from the campus and walked to the campus, and it was just—it was a wonderful time for me, because the intellectual life of Chicago was just terrific.

You asked, why did I decide to go to Chicago? Well, I decided when I was at Harvard, before I graduated, since I grew up in Boston and I went to Harvard, which is in Cambridge, my father had been to Harvard, I wanted to be someplace else. When I applied to Harvard, I knew I was going to get into Harvard because I had straight A's, but I applied to Williams, and I think Swarthmore, you know. But I wanted to go someplace else, and when I looked at universities, Chicago had a very good reputation and it was an interesting city, and it was in the middle west so I'd be out of the East. I wanted some novelty. I thought well, this is going to be real, I'll go there. I didn't go there to study with Strauss at all. In fact, I don't even remember hearing Strauss's name. I didn't know much of anything about anybody. When I got to Chicago, the first thing I did in the first term is I took a course—when I started this conversation I'd completely forgotten that the

professor involved was David Easton.[2] He was the one who did systems theory. At first I thought that was very interesting, and then I said: This is okay; this is a way of classifying things, but it's not very interesting, not compared to this man Strauss. Because I just loved what he did, and—

GM: And what was the first course you took with him, do you remember?

RM: All I remember is that I was entranced, I thought it was really fun, and so I went to a second course with him, and there was no question what I was doing. And very soon I realized that I had to pick a thesis topic, and I was interested in various theorists, but my wife at that point had really done a lot of work in French, and she wanted at that point to maybe teach. So I thought: Well, I never studied French; I studied Spanish in college but I'd sort of not done anything with it. But in reading various people, I thought Rousseau was fascinating and he was in French, and Judith thought it was interesting because we talked about it. And before too long, though I forget when, we decided that since I was working on a thesis on Rousseau and she had nothing to do, she would translate. And I suggested we start with the First and Second Discourses,[3] because the First Discourse is something that is so obviously relevant, you know, it's a very explosive book. All the stuff we're doing is bad? You know? It's exciting and different.

Well, you know, it took a long time. In fact, I have the clearest recollection of this, actually not long ago, suddenly realizing what it was like for Rousseau in some detail. I never really put myself into Rousseau's shoes, but why did Rousseau write anything? Well, he was a printer's apprentice in Geneva, with his Calvinist clothes and so on, and he was somebody who loved to just wander off and pick the daisies, and the only time he could get out of the city was on Sunday after the church service. And he would stay out, and they blew a bugle I think at 4:00 or something like that, and you had to go back inside because they locked the gates, and on two occasions Rousseau had been so far away picking the daisies that he didn't get back in time. So he slept out under the walls, and then as soon as they opened the door in the morning he went back to the print shop, and the printer was furious that his apprentice was late, and spanked him or hit him or something. And that happened twice, and the third time it happened, Jean-Jacques said: I'm not going to go back and let that guy beat me up. He took off, nothing on his back. And I don't think people, when they study Rousseau, ever thought that his walking from Geneva to Paris with a little stay in Chambéry, where he had a little affair, but the main thing is not that he discovered sexuality, which is not a bad thing to do, but anyway, that he had this experience of walking alone across Europe. What an astounding experience! And seeing the difference between the little villages where people would invite him in and give him a meal and stuff like that, and then walking up to Paris, this incredible city, center of, intellectual life, you know? Well, then he sees the filth of the city compared to the pretty other—all of the First Discourse is embedded in his experience walking from Geneva to Paris. And I have found that really fascinating, because I don't think enough

[2] David Easton: see "People."
[3] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, trans. Judith R. Masters, ed. Roger D. Masters (Bedford/St. Martins, 1969).

people have paid attention to what it's like to walk that kind of distance. Good health: healthy mind, healthy body.

But anyway, I was entranced by Rousseau, and we translated him and we ended up translating the *First and Second Discourses*, then another volume, the *Social Contract*,[4] then I ended up even after Judith was a social worker co-editing with Chris Kelly at Boston College The Collected Writings.[5] So I had then published my thesis, "Political Philosophy of Rousseau," so it was after all the thesis that I did under Strauss. So my first really major publication was as a Straussian.

But as I continued to work, while there was no question that whenever I studied anything theoretical, I was looking at it as Strauss did. That when I did that, I saw other things, and one of the things I always saw was an understanding of human nature, which people always talked about. But that now, there was this huge thing when I read Robert Ardrey's *African Genesis*.[6]

GM: Robert, what's the last name?

RM: Ardrey, A-r-d-r-e-y. Now Bob, I got to know Bob a little bit. I met him a number of times. Bob was just a writer who was sort of interested in popularizing things, and he thought all this stuff that was being done by these anthropologists who went to Africa and studied what these animal groups were like in the chimpanzees and so forth, and that this was revolutionary in terms of the understanding of society. I mean, it's what gave rise to that book by Edward O. Wilson. And when Edward O. Wilson published *Sociobiology*,[7] I therefore bought it. And I got to know Ed particularly once I got back to Boston. And he was, Ed was such a brilliant man but he's very steady, mild mannered, not in the slightest flamboyant, and I think he was astounded that this book had so much of an effect. But the fact is that intellectually the time was ripe to break down the social sciences. When I think back on it, I never thought about it at the time, because the disaster of the Cold War from the point of view of American society was that we had always been an isolationist society until the First World War. And in the First World War, Wilson realized that the Germans really controlled everything in Europe there might be some real problems for the United States. It was better to side with the democracies, so we had to get into the war. We had such a strong relationship with England in particular, we couldn't allow the Germans to control England. And he got Americans to agree to do that, and the First World War was a terrifying experience for Americans because it was so brutal. Trench warfare. We lost so many troops that after the war in the '20's the basic feeling was we should have nothing to do with this kind of thing again. We've saved Europe, okay, and then after all the 20's were—everywhere in the industrialized world, let's have peace and quiet, we'll just mind our own business. And then the market economy collapsed in '29 so that we had this whole new era which didn't happen until FDR got elected, and that

[4] *On the Social Contract*, trans. Judith R. Masters, ed. Roger D. Masters (St. Martins, 1978).
[5] Collected Writings of Rousseau, a multi-volume series published by the University Press of New England from 1990-2007.
[6] *African Genesis: A Personal Investigation into the Animal Origins and Nature of Man* (1961).
[7] E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Harvard University Press, 1975).

completely changed American society domestically but increased the notion that we should have nothing to do with any other country; we had to solve our own problems.

And it was during that period in the late ’30’s that the America First movement was founded. And this was important for me only because in my life, one of the fundamental things about the America First movement was they were very strongly antisemitic. Very strongly antisemitic, and in fact, one reason for that was that the two people who founded it, Henry Ford and Charles Lindberg, were antisemites, and so they were in favor of the final solution. And I knew about that much more than almost anybody you have ever talked to, because the Jews that escaped the Holocaust came to—one of the major ports if not the major port was Boston, where we were living. And the National Council of Jewish Women would send a group of women to each boat with a manifest, so they knew the names of every family on that boat. My mother was in charge of that because she was a terrific organizer, and so she had the permit to go out at the foot of the gangplank. Families would come down one at a time, she’d take them through customs, she knew Yiddish so she could use that, she could translate for them, get them through customs, then she’d go back and get another family. The family got out the other side, there was always a woman who had from the manifest the name of the family, took them to her house. These families, the whole thing was the first night they were going to be in a home, they were going to be welcomed. And the last family always came to our house. And my first memory in life at age six is playing on a red living room rug with those little metal cars with usually one or two kids. I couldn’t say a word in German, they couldn’t speak English. I get very emotional. I knew they were safe.

And because we’d followed the rise of Hitler very carefully in our family, my mother was just very active, my father was—there was no question a very close attention, association with being Jewish, and it really was important to me after that point to pay attention to this issue of religion and how important freedom was in America and how lucky we were to be here. But also there was antisemitism. I’m one of the last generation of people I think you’ll meet who was knocked down, spit on and called a dirty Jew on the way going to school. And I just learned to avoid those people and that was the end of that. And then in high school, taking an algebra class, and next to me, the row sitting next to me, there was a football player. He was a tackle. I remember his name, Nick Babble. Nice guy. But one day he leans over to me, we got a problem and it’s a quiz, and he says [whispers], “I can’t do it, I can’t do it. They’ll throw me off the team.” He was afraid that if he flunked he’d get thrown off the football team and the football team was what counted to him. I said, “See me after class.” So I went on the bench right after that class, and I showed Nick how to do it one step at a time, it wasn’t that hard. So we were always sitting together.

GM: So you were his tutor.

RM: Nobody touched me. [Laughs] They would have to fight Nick.

GM: Very good.

RM: I didn’t do it for that reason, though. But it’s one of these incredibly funny things that just happens. And one of the things you learn to do, by the way, and it’s interesting because when I came to Dartmouth, one of the things that happened to me when I was

here was funny, because when I graduated from high school I wouldn't apply to Dartmouth because it was reputed to be anti-semitic. But when I was teaching at Yale as a non-tenured assistant professor, I realized that I better look for a tenured position, because you can never be sure whether you're getting tenure and the best thing to do is to line one up, and then if they weren't going to try and keep you then get out of there before you were on the market with no place to go. And I went to a number of places, but my wife and I came up to Hanover and in three milliseconds she said I want to live here. [Laughs] Much nicer than—she wanted to bring our kids up to the country and out of New Haven. And so we came up here, and when I started teaching, not long after I started teaching, one of the first black people on the faculty got hired. Not in my department, in English, Bill Cook.[8] And I remember this because there was a service in memoriam of Bill in the last year, which I went to because I got to know Bill, and I remember afterwards talking to people in his family and commenting on the fact that there was a lot of discussion about his coming here and racism. And I said: You know that I had a special relationship with your father or your grandfather or whatever, your uncle. And I explained that we got to know each other because we were the two groups that were outsiders.

I explained to his relatives at this meeting that Bill and I both understood, and we didn't have to talk about it, we knew it, and we may have talked about it a couple times: the trick was you just do your job. Don't make waves, just do your job and be useful for doing your job and people leave you alone, which is what I did in the army and it worked fine. The younger kids in his family were interested in how simple that was. Of course it was important to me to stay here, because I liked it here and my wife liked it and the kids liked it, and so I was glad that I got to stay here. And I started working on Rousseau—oh, I was going to look at my CV but I don't really have to, I guess. It's just that the, I got some things in here, in this thing here I've got a CV.

But the point is that my career, starting at Yale, became first of all a way in which I could make a mark writing about Rousseau and then political theorists. But secondly, I was always doing something else. The first memory I have about Yale was that I lived in a house that was not far from the campus on something called Cannon Street, and just around the corner about a block, block and a half away, there was a park called East Rock Park. A huge red cliff with a little stream that came by at the foot of it and then a playground there, and it was a wonderful place to go because you could walk through, you could picnic there, and because of this cliff they could never put a road through there. So we used to go picnicking, and then all the sudden the state highway department announced they were going to put an access road between this new interstate, I91, and the main north-south roads out of New Haven—like most coastal cities, a web of things out to suburbs from the center of town. And one of them was not far from that rock, so they were going to put a connector from the interstate to Waverly Avenue. I've forgotten the name. It doesn't matter. And I thought it was just insane to destroy that beautiful park.

GM: Were they just going to blast the rock away?

[8] William W. Cook (1933-2017), Israel Evans Professor of Oratory and Belles Lettres at Dartmouth College.

RM: No, they couldn't blast the rock. It was it was about as tall as the Empire State Building.

GM: Oh, a huge cliff.

RM: Huge cliff. So I had a neighbor, Bill Knorr, who was in the divinity school but just lived down the street, I think he was involved with the city council in some way. But I had a conversation with him; I said: This is crazy for them to put—this is a priceless park. And he said yeah. And I said: I think I'll start a group to try and protest it. So before I knew it I was the chairman of the Save the Park Committee, and I stopped the highway department. [Laughs] Because the mayor was behind me, everybody was behind me, I had the city behind me, and the highway department finally decided there was no point in fighting when you've got people in the legislature who say you shouldn't destroy that park. We'll make another connector,

which they connected further out of town, which was better anyway, and it didn't matter. But suddenly I was really involved in practical politics, because it was fun and I enjoyed it. But I really began working hard on Rousseau and also I started to write other things. You see that my CV starts very early branching out into other areas.

GM: There's a trajectory there, though, I think: Rousseau, Tocqueville, and democratic participation.

RM: Well, Rousseau is the big key. We tend to forget how embedded he was, and just as my experience of getting out of the Greater Boston community and the Jewish community, first encountering Strauss in Chicago—no, first getting in the army, but then encountering Strauss in Chicago and discovering there was this other new world. My coming to Chicago was a little bit like Rousseau coming to Paris, though I never thought of myself that way; I look back now and say yes, because just as Rousseau encountered Diderot and it was "wow." Last night it occurred to me if Rousseau is walking between Geneva and Chambéry, and he met somebody who was a gypsy who actually could read the future. Doesn't exist, but say it did exist, and the gypsy said, "You know, Jean-Jacques, you're going to be one of the most famous people coming out of Geneva of this century. Two hundred years from now, everybody will know your name. He says: "What?" You'll be a famous political philosopher. What's that? He wouldn't have known what political philosophy was, and he wouldn't have believed that he'd be famous. You know? Such an astounding change for him when he encountered the *philosophes* in Paris. And in particular, when he encountered the *philosophes* with this idea that compared to Geneva this place is rotten, it's dirty, a lot of people are cheating each other. We're not like that in Geneva, you know? So he writes that up in this little essay competition and wow, wins the prize, to his astonishment. And he's suddenly a world historical figure.

GM: Right.

RM: And it happens fast. And somehow what I did first, because Judith wanted to have something to do in New Haven, was we translated the Discourses. And the book was very successful. It was so successful.

GM: Generations have benefited from your notes, as well.

RM: The point is that I wasn't just a translator. And that's Strauss. I mean, without Strauss I never would have done that. And my whole career, therefore, that's why Strauss's picture is there. [Gestures to a photo of Strauss on a nearby shelf] Every once in a while, I say "Thanks, Leo." He did so much for me, and the point is that in general, I didn't have any personal contact with him in my courses.

GM: What do you mean?

RM: I was terrified.

GM: Oh, I see. You never went to talk with him.

RM: I never thought I was smart enough. Well, and in those days, there weren't much, I don't remember much of that stuff anyway.

GM: I see.

RM: He was still obviously working on his own work, and I didn't think that it was appropriate to bother him because I didn't think—I mean, I understood what was going on very well. I mean, I got good grades, and I never went to his office until I was—I'm trying to remember when it was when I went to his office, but it blew my mind, because it was then that he addressed me as if I could do important political theory. I remember because I think I already had a job lined up.

GM: And so you were writing your dissertation at the time?

RM: Yeah, but I wanted to talk to him about a teaching career as well as my thesis, and so I talked with him. I said, "You know, I'm very concerned about teaching and want to make sure I'd do a good job." And he said, "That's easy. Always assume there's a silent student in class who knows more than you do." It never left me.

GM: Yes. So presumably when you were devising a thesis topic and he was your supervisor, you must have had some conversations with him about what you were going to write on.

RM: Oh yeah.

GM: Yes, all right. So it wasn't a real absence of contact.

RM: And what I wanted to do was write something that made Rousseau as a thinker understandable from *his* perspective. That is to say, put it this way: because I discovered something very interesting about what I did and what Strauss did and other areas of life which I would call artistic excellence in musical performance. Because I realized that just as when I was reading Rousseau, I tried to think: All right, I'm Rousseau, how does this fit in with something else I've written? The pianist, I think it was a pianist; anyway, I know it happened with this pianist. Tonight I'm going to a concert here of a pianist named Sally Pincus. She's on the music faculty here. She gives concerts all over the world. She is very unpretentious but very, very good, really good, and I once asked her about this after a concert. I said, "Is it true that when you're playing the music, when you're preforming, you're on the stage, you're not playing Chopin or Beethoven, his music is coming through you. You have his music completely occupying your whole

mind." She said, "Yeah, that's the way it is. That's the way it is. You're expressing the music, you're not playing the music."

GM: Right.

RM: And that to me was very interesting, and I've had conversations with a number of performers; and I only want to talk to a really good performer because a beginner is never going to have that, but the great performers all do. And what Strauss taught me, of course, is that's the only way you understand anybody who's really serious. And why is anybody really serious going to be that way? It's because what you need to create is different than what you create. You have some project or whatever, some would call it *telos*, and have a purpose to what you're doing. For instance, Strauss had the purpose obviously of making the text stand on its own feet because we couldn't possibly put ourselves into the historical condition, so treating it all as a march of history was his real enemy because it made, the thinker simply a log on the river flowing down in a predetermined way, and the point is that these thinkers in many major circumstances actually directed where the river went. And certainly one of the biggest cases for me was not Rousseau—I mean Rousseau, yes, in lots of ways; that is, what I wanted to end was the notion that all Rousseau was, was the *Social Contract*, or all that Rousseau was, was the *Nouvelle Heloise*, or all that Rousseau was, was something in the intellectual movement of his time, but that he was somebody who had a lot to teach us right now.

But what I've been really impressed with most recently, and I've got two books on it, is Machiavelli. And Machiavelli is important, and actually I realized, to my astonishment, that I never really focused on this, but I never really focused on this because I didn't look at historical surroundings. And in Machiavelli's case, there's no question that in order to do what Strauss told me to do, I had to know about that. Why? What did Machiavelli do before he wrote anything? Do you know? Well, he was the second secretary to the Signoria of the Florentine Republic.

What does that mean? Florence was the richest city in Europe because of the Medici, and therefore it had immense relationships all over the place. People came there from anywhere and so forth, and he got a job working for the Signoria and very quickly, because he was so good, became in charge of both foreign relations and military policy for the city, because it was a small city. And so he had really a very responsible position and one of the things he did in that position, is he went for some particular reason to the court of Cesare Borgia, who was an important political figure for the foreign policy of Florence. When he got to that court, there was somebody else who was there, but not for the meeting. He was doing frescoes in Cesare's castle, and his name was Leonardo da Vinci. And they had these fascinating discussions, and one of the things that Leonardo thought of was making Florence a seaport. Why? Well, now I think of it totally different than I did in the two books when I wrote about this. The point is that Columbus didn't discover America. He certainly did not discover it. He thought he was in India on his first voyage in 1492.

GM: Right.

RM: 1498, what happened was the King of Portugal hired Amerigo to take a trip. Why? Oh, because Amerigo Vespucci was, a Florentine who was in Seville. What was he doing

in Seville? He was the business agent of the Medici. And the Medici had banks all over the place, and he was not only in charge of that bank but he established a whole merchandising center for buying and reselling things, because Seville had become a very important city because of the union of Aragon and Castille. But Amerigo was in charge of that, and when Columbus went to have his ship, all of the outfitting of that ship was supervised by Amerigo Vespucci. Amerigo also learned how to take bearings for longitude and latitude. So Columbus asked him to come on the boat and just keep track of things and map. And so he went to the boat, and he came back from that and within a year or something like that, the Portuguese king decided that the Portuguese under Henry the Navigator had mapped the entire west coast of Africa, and Columbus thought he'd been to Asia. So the Portuguese wanted to get in on the Asian trade which was going to be much more lucrative than anything of Africa or going around the Cape—it just didn't make any sense. So Amerigo took that boat for the King of Portugal. His first trip, I think it was 1498, he landed on the coast of Colombia.

This is a very early map of Eurasia.

GM: Oh, I see.

RM: They thought there was land there that was right there.

This is one of the early maps of what a sphere was, and the earth is a lot smaller, and you can see this is Spain, this is Saudi Arabia.

GM: Right. And India, the subcontinent, yeah.

RM: But in 1474 there was a mapmaker named Toscanelli, in Florence I think he was, and he made spheres. And so he made a sphere and then decided to make a map of the connection between the far western coast of the Eurasian land mass and the far eastern coast of the Eurasian land mass. This is just this thing put around a sphere and the way you look at that thing there. So the Atlantic Ocean is very small. And this is the map that Columbus had. That's why he thought he was in Asia. And this is the map that Amerigo had. Except that when Amerigo sailed—this is the first map that has a continent in here. But when Amerigo sailed, he hit the northern coast of South America on the coastline of what's now Colombia, and he went down that coastline until he got to the Amazon, and then went back to Portugal and then went back to Florence and did two things. He published a little pamphlet called "Mundus Novus," the New World. Because going down the coastline, he encountered, because he needed water for his ships, these little communities and they were primitive and they were very nice, they gave him water, they gave him food, and clearly these people had nothing to do with Asia. They had nothing to do with Europe. In fact, they had no idea there was anything there, and therefore they had no idea of Jesus or Christianity.

So when Mundus Novus is published, I think it's 1501, 1502, the thing that I took down and I've got copies of it behind me somewhere and I'm just not going to take time to look for it, it's called the Cantino Planisphere. It's the first picture, first map, 1502, of the coastline of South America; and what it does, it has the coastline of what Amerigo discovered on his first voyage on the map. And it's very clear what he did. And he went down that coastline and he came back and that map that's called the Cantino Planisphere

is also 1502, and it was printed. So all over Europe there was a map and the little pamphlet, and he called it the New World, it was something between Asia and Europe. And that's why I have that, this is what, 1507, that's the Waldseemuller, that's the first world map like this. But anyway, the key thing that actually, if you look at the Waldseemuller, you'll see that the west coast of North America and South America is sort of a straight line because they came up the east coast in South America. Inland from the coast there's a row of mountains, and then incognita it just says because it's a straight line. There's something over there, we don't know what it is.

It was very, very striking. But that whole discovery is explosive. And it's explosive because when Machiavelli learns of it, and we know Machiavelli had to know about it right away after this voyage where Amerigo called the Mundus Novus, he had to know it, and the reason he had to know about it is that he's still working in the Signoria. But he has a couple people who are his private secretaries or assistants, and one of them is a man named Augustino Vespucci, Amerigo's nephew.

So people don't know. I discovered that and I said: "Oh, no wonder." Machiavelli's history is when the Medici overthrow the republic, they see him as a potential revolutionary. They tortured him for a year, put him under house arrest, and that's when he starts writing. And he writes, of course, *The Prince*, which has nothing to do on the surface with what he really thinks. We know that, but then why did he write that book that way as a pamphlet, easily understandable, for Lorenzo di Medici, not the famous Lorenzo the Magnificent, but his grand-nephew I think it is, who the family had assigned to run, I forget what the town was. It begins with O but it doesn't matter. He was given authority to control a town, its government, and Machiavelli realized that writing this book, with all this tough-minded stuff for this playboy kid who didn't know what the hell he was doing, was his get out of jail free card for the Medici family. I'll serve you perfectly well; I don't care about the republic. But if you don't know the circumstances of writing *The Prince*, that Machiavelli's under house arrest for suspicion of being a republican revolutionary, you don't understand the book at all. You know? And so I realized early that in the case of Machiavelli the history does tell you something about what he intended. And this doesn't mean that he's determined by history; it means that in fact he's changing history in some reason because of his context, and you can't understand that, I think, just as you couldn't understand Aristotle if you didn't what Plato wrote.

GM: Do you think Strauss assumed that students knew the history? I mean, obviously he himself knew it.

RM: Strauss assumed that if you took a course in political theory and it was called political theory, not political philosophy, you didn't treat the books as truly philosophic books as he did. You treated them just as advice about politics and it fit the time and it fit what people said before. So the history starts with the Greeks, where this guy Socrates is going around, and Plato realizes that behind all these conventional views, there's something that's a core that's there. And when he speaks of forms, the first and obvious thing (which I never heard anybody say) is that one of the things they talk about in different places—when you go back and you try to really understand, you have to get down to the bottom of what's happening with Socrates. People talk about [how] they got

penned dogs, and they talk about dogs all the time: “Well, I’ve got a German Shepherd, he’s very interesting because he does this.” “Oh no, it’s funny because my dachshund doesn’t do that at all.” What is it that’s the core they’re talking about? Well, all the dogs have, basically they’ve got these four legs, they’ve got a tail. Humans don’t have a tail. So if you talk about the form of something, it [is] just the evident thing that makes these people or these things different from something else. Because their form is not difficult. It’s not a disembodied idea that has nothing to do with reality, disembodied idea. And we now know that it’s pure information. Pure information in the genes. And it’s got to be genes that are consistent and proves fertile offspring. That’s as much of a form of forms as you could possibly have. That is, one of the things that astounded me about the teaching of the ancients when I thought seriously about it, which is in the last ten years, is how accurate it is scientifically now.

Strauss was right. All the historians missed it.

GM: What was Strauss right about?

RM: That philosophy is about seeking the truth about being, and being is not a historical product but what is behind the historical product and its manifestation under different circumstances in different times and places. And there may be a pattern to these changes in different times and places, but the fundamental thing is to find out what the being is as it appears from different perspectives, because you are in different perspectives. When you’re looking at a mountain from different—I think East Rock Park, it was different if you were at the top or the bottom or here or there. It was also different you were designing highways and you wanted a connector, or if you were a citizen and you wanted a place to walk. So clearly there’s something very profound about political philosophy that you can find in medicine, you can find it anyplace else, but the one thing is that to reduce everything to a mere manifestation of political history or of history in some other sense is simply to miss what’s going on, because there’s always something that we learn from Socrates, from Aristotle, or from Machiavelli or St. Thomas Aquinas. There’s always something to learn, and what’s more, learning the difference between the esoteric and public meanings is the only way you can learn anything about the world.

GM: How much did Strauss directly address that theme of esoteric meanings?

RM: It was very clear that there was an esoteric meaning. He was very clear that when you were a philosopher, you had to write for other philosophers in a way that didn’t cause you to be harmed, and that it was obvious before philosophers wrote anything from Socrates. And the question is: Why did Plato write down things about Socrates? Easily because Plato realized that this was something humans could do with their brains that they had to do, and the only way you could do that was to present a way of looking at being that people didn’t think of, and having students who you talked to and who had their own responses, and you wanted them to understand what you were doing, but above all you wanted them to do what Socrates did, because you didn’t know what you did that was wrong. I mean, and Strauss, well, Strauss said always assume there’s a silent student in class who knows more than you do.

That’s when I understood what Strauss was really teaching about. Because if you think of the esoteric meaning, you think of that as part of a dialogue with these people who are

going to say "Ah, but you were wrong." And I have come to think of Socrates in a very different way which Strauss never talked about. He didn't talk about the natural sciences, for a very good reason; he didn't know about them and he was not going to talk about things he didn't know. But clearly, so many political philosophers have dealt with that, the question of what nature is, is something that was crucial.

GM: Certainly.

RM: And all I realized is that in order to teach about Rousseau, you couldn't think about teaching about Rousseau and ignore what was being done by the anthropologist looking at monkeys and apes without misleading contemporary students. And none of the people who were studying Rousseau were talking about that, but I thought that was what you had to do.

That's why I started working with these other people, because there was a lot of people, a dozen at least, who started this and it took off, you know, like a rocket. But all of that for me has been Strauss, who got me started. Such a difference from what I, had in my head when I think of some of the first people who studied science, for instance. They just were not interesting. Then, from the point of view of what I ultimately wanted to do my work on, they were interesting for the things they had to say but not from what I wanted my life to be. I didn't want to be a chemist and work in a smelly lab. I wanted to work on words, that's what I liked, but I wanted to see the truth in words and what it can teach us of what we don't know. And my more recent understanding is that Socrates is far more responsible for modern science, and not just modern political philosophy, than we realize. Why? You can't do science unless you begin by saying: What don't I know? And because very few political philosophers have studied science to the point where they're respected as a scientist as I am now, then I realized yeah, you have to say we don't know this.

And it's exciting to see that political philosophy is scientific and that that's very important, just as, for example, I came across a copy of something I haven't published. It's an essay on the scientific reason, I think for socialized medicine. But, that is, the whole notion that the Constitution of the United States says that Congress shall pass laws for the common defense and general welfare. Well, dealing with this whole idea that a biologist, nothing to do with politics, is kind of foolish because one of the things of general welfare is contagious disease. And one of the things that moderns really realized about contagious disease was the great flu epidemic after World War I.

And we know there are still—you know, Zika, but once you understand that contagious diseases require political response, you see that the political scientists who don't want to study biology don't understand anything. They're mistaken in a profound way about how you can run government because among other things, in an educational system you have to have an educational system that has some way of dealing with both geniuses and retarded kids, and not everybody being the same . . . is to say that I discovered something recently, very interesting, you know, namely, people are different.

GM: Could I ask you a question?

RM: You should start asking questions all the time.

GM: Right, okay. A little while ago you mentioned that the first book you published was as a Straussian, and I just wondered what you meant by a "Straussian"?

RM: I think of myself as a Straussian and as somebody who does biology and politics, and I don't think of those things as at all antithetical, because I wouldn't do the second without having done the first.

GM: But what is it to be a Straussian then, for you?

RM: Oh, it's quite simple. First of all, you have to agree that there's always that silent student in class. You can't do science without that. It's absolutely true for the natural sciences, but non-scientists don't realize it, and you have to do it for political philosophy. That means you're always open to the fact you make mistakes.

GM: Right.

RM: That's the first thing, but it's the most important thing. Secondly, you cannot ignore human nature. There's no way of understanding human behavior without understanding why we're different from either monkeys or rats or—you have to know what it is to be human. However, now if you only use the historical view of human nature, you're a historicist, which is not what Strauss wanted you to do.

GM: When you say to use the historical view, you mean reading Aristotle and Locke and Hobbes and authors like that?

RM: The view of human nature has to be viewed as being considered seriously as what it was, and then you have to be aware that it is important to try to find out why it's different from our current biological view of human nature, otherwise your student's going to be confused. So you have to know in particular, what does Aristotle say about human nature that is essentially true and in fact may be missed by people who do biology? And the answer is *telos*, because there is an end in the Aristotelian sense to human behavior. Now if you say Darwin is opposed to ancient, to Aristotle or Socrates, survival of the fittest is a *telos*. It's not the only *telos*, however, because men can get together in warfare and have the enthusiasm of dying for the group. So that clearly indicates that there's something more complicated, and we have to keep on working on what that *telos* is. And a *telos* clearly has to do with something that is purely, if I can say spiritual, I could say the point is it's not material. That is, it's not material because there's always some purpose beyond the self that the self is seeking. Now it's true that the self has its own instincts, its own impulses, but following my own impulses is itself an end, and the question is, if you are only following your own purposes without linking them to anything else, then you are essentially an animal. But humans, if you look around at humans, they don't do that. Well, you know some people who do that, they're people who are not really able to change the world. They're not even able to get elected dog catcher.

GM: So in a way for you, then, studying contemporary biology is very important, but also to read the historical writings of people like Aristotle and Hobbes and so on. Contemporary science hasn't taken the place of that because they articulate an understanding that is much richer, larger than a merely scientific understanding?

RM: In particular, for example, Machiavelli. It turns out that I think, as I suggested but never really understood before, that the impact of Amerigo Vespucci's discovery of a new world with these people who didn't know anything about Europe is crucial for Machiavelli, because it means that you have to rethink everything in the past.

GM: Why?

RM: Well, why weren't those people like us? And why are they like us? And what's different? And why are they in some ways nicer than us, as Rousseau said? When did Rousseau write? Oh, well, first of all he walked across the countryside, so he saw that these people in the countryside were in many ways nicer than the people in Paris. And then oh, well, there were these people traveling around the world when he wrote, right? After all, what was happening in America? You know? You just open your mind to things you didn't say, and I think that political philosophy is much more fun when you do this, but only if you really understand the book as it stands on its own feet, as Strauss taught me to do. That is, if I'm going to be the individual, the student at the foot of Rousseau who understands more than Rousseau, as I may or may not, but if I take science seriously, Rousseau would love to have a conversation with me about human nature. He would love it.

So I think that the idea that you have to view these things as somehow inconsistent with each other is true only if you're talking about the ordinary or non-philosophic level of life or nonesoteric level. That is, what I discovered is that there's always something in a good scientist that he has to teach me, and that it turns out he's fascinated when he discovered what I've had to say. I mean, I've had very good conversations with Wilson. He didn't have difficulty understanding how his thinking was incredibly useful to somebody who studied political philosophy. He hadn't really focused on that but he thought that was very interesting. So I found it very easy to talk to him and he found it easy to talk to me. But I think that that happens periodically, and yet it also happens a lot that you talk to people and you realize: Well, I'm not going to talk him about what I do. Or what I do now is I say—well, you know what I study now is toxic chemicals and behavior, which is very important. I mean, there the point is fascinating. I got into this entirely because of other people. It started when I went to a conference in California, and I was around a table with this guy named Ed (oh, I usually come up with it right away, it doesn't matter) who said that he was interested in violence but he discovered that two of these violent criminals that he was working with had high levels of lead in their blood.

GM: How did it come to be found out that they did have high levels of lead?

RM: I don't think he explained that. Somebody tested their blood for some other reason and found that they had high lead levels in their blood, but I don't know why they tested their blood.

GM: Okay.

RM: But the point is, I'm on the way back from that meeting, and I say, "Wait a second." I mean, I know the guy's first name is Ed, but you know how it is when you don't have a name, you just forget it, it'll come to me later. If that's right, then where there's lead pollution there should be more crime. I thought about that some more. I thought about

that some more when I was at school, and another problem to work on, and I'm going to work on that. I got a bunch of students, I had three very bright students and I got them to put together a spreadsheet. Why? I'd been assigned a course at Yale which was on scope and method things. No, was that at Yale or was that at Dartmouth? I think I might have already been at Dartmouth, I can't remember which, it doesn't matter. I asked these kids to create a spreadsheet for every county in the United States, all the socioeconomic data, population, blacks, income, and stuff, and to get me then the lead level that was the EPA saying there was lead pollution. Yes or no? And I had to learn how to do the mathematics, but I'd been in this course with Dennis Sullivan. It was here at Dartmouth. He was the guy that did mathematics; you know, statistical studies and things. And so the idea was to have one course was with the philosopher and the most scientific people, guy on the faculty. There wasn't anybody else, he's since passed away. We did a lot of things together, but we published some stuff together. I just learned that there was this mathematical stuff you could do, and suddenly I was doing work on toxins and behavior. And I did it because I followed what was new and what looked like it had something important to do with society. That is, if you could find out that there was something in the environment that really was causing violent crime that people didn't know about, and you could get rid of it or do something about it, that is as untouched now as it was then. And actually what happened when I—[9]

GM: Here you go. You were talking about Rousseau.

RM: Well actually, what I'm talking about now is my own career. When I think about Rousseau walking toward Chambéry and what he would have thought he was doing, I think about this case. My father had a small business. It started in 1920 when he got out of Harvard and he couldn't get a job teaching, which is what he wanted to do. So he went to work for somebody and then he realized there was a business that really was needed. Movie theaters had just started. Traditional theaters, when there was going to be a new play, you know, Romeo and Juliette coming in two weeks, the owner of the theater would go out on the stage with a placard and say, "Coming in two weeks," you know. Well, when they started movies, the first thing was well, how are we going to tell people what the next movie is? The room is dark. Oh, the best thing to do is take a little—we have titles in front of the movie, take a title of this coming next week and put it on some film and attach it to the film we're playing. Well, it was called a trailer, although sometimes it was shown at the beginning or between the news and the play on the movie or whatever, and my father decided he would make those things. For that, he had to have a way of printing, just a letterpress to print the titles. He had to have a way of setting up a camera to take the title, and above all he had to have a place to develop and make copies of the film, because Kodak sold movie film, he could get 35 mm film, but he had to develop and print. Well, this is in Boston, and once he got started he had the only place where you could develop and print movie film, for the moment at least, in New England. But also he realized that all through New England there were theaters. When I was growing up, whenever we went out, we liked to ski in the winter, take the whole family skiing, we would stop in towns and he would go in and see the owner or the manager of the theater. And I remember that we used to go to a place just outside of Laconia called Belknap, and

[9] The tape disk was changed at this point.

he often stopped in Laconia to talk to a theater owner, and we always stayed overnight at a place called the Barracks, which is right near the ski area. It was run by somebody named Connie and Bill Austin and I used to go there long after he passed away. And when I was going there when I was in college, I discovered that—I always washed or dried the dishes with my mother after meals, after dinner, so I discovered they needed somebody to help out in the kitchen because they had these double decker bunks, they had lots of people, it was a cheap place to go, and usually got a ride up with a guy who was in the navy at Newport and he would come through Boston and take me up and back so I didn't have to drive because I didn't own a car. And I would wash dishes for room and board.

And so after the noon meal, everybody's off skiing and I'd wash and dry the dishes and then Connie or Bill would take me out and somebody else would bring me home.

But I mean I did lots of things like that, which were, you know, which were fun. But the core of things was set by this decision that my father expected and everybody expected that I would take over his business. I had an older brother who was an engineer, and he could fix anything but he was not going to run a business. That was not the kind of thing he wanted to do. But I could do that, I worked with my father a lot and I was just going to take over the business. One day I was walking home from school, I think I was still in junior high school, because from where I think I was between Newton High School and my home, and I said to myself, you know "I want to be a teacher. I like my father's business, but I want to be a teacher." I walked home, and I started to think about that. The more I thought about it, the more I thought yeah, I want to be a teacher.

GM: And you didn't know what you wanted to teach, but you knew you wanted to teach.

RM: I wanted to teach something. Now my father made some films that were educational films, and some of these films like, I remember making one of the Brown Shoe Company in Gardiner, Maine, about how they made shoes, which they took to those exhibits where somebody from Jordan Marsh would go to see what shoes they wanted to buy. And here they had this film about how they made shoes. But I remember lugging lights around for that and doing stuff to help out with making it and so forth. But I realized that while I had expected to go to my father's business and I could do it, what I really wanted to do was to teach. And I think that was before I had this experience with Nick Babble where I taught him how to do algebra. But I'd certainly been doing things, like explaining things to other people and finding that I loved to do that. It worked, and I found I could do that and so forth.

GM: That's interesting, because often people are inspired by a teacher, but you were again inspired by the experience, by the activity.

RM: Well, the activity was in a way inspired by my father's work with these educational films. And I worked on those things, so that's one place it came. And another place it came from really liking some teachers and being struck by how much they could teach. I remember a Spanish teacher really affected me. Going back, I remember some teachers. A kindergarten teacher, Miss Cain I remember had a big influence, I really was excited by learning things in particular courses. Miss Collins was in third grade, another one. But anyway, it doesn't make any difference. The big thing is that when I decided I wanted to

be a teacher, I said "Oh, I got to tell my father." And I said, "He's not going to like it." Well, you cannot not tell your father, because if you don't want to go into his business and take it over, he's going to need to know that in terms of his planning, and you're going to need to make arrangements, which is probably going to cost money, to go to graduate school. So you got to talk to him. So I got my courage up one day and I said I wanted to talk to him, not at meal but just personally. And I was terrified. I said: "I'm afraid you're not going to like this, but I've given it a lot of thought and I think I want to be a teacher. I mean, I like the business but I think what I really would do best is to be a teacher." He was thrilled. He was thrilled because when he graduated from Harvard he wanted to be a teacher. And the best part of what he was doing was a teaching thing, and he was thrilled that I would think of that.

GM: Well that's great.

RM: But that is this, I mean, one of my sons is a professor at Tufts.

GM: What does he teach?

RM: He teaches something very interesting. He teaches food and its necessity. He got started in food in Africa because he discovered that the whole food production activity, field, whatever, that's just a bad pun to call it a field, was tremendously influenced by the design of seeds and is suited to environments. But the seed companies had gone from traditional just replicating seeds to find out what do the seeds need to grow in the Midwest or the Southwest or whatever? And Will—my younger son is William—Will realized that one of the crucial problems in Africa is that the American or European seed companies didn't do that. There wasn't a market. The market wasn't big enough. And he began to work on getting those things done in universities. And guess what? What is similar in what he was doing and what I've done? The notion that there's an ethical dimension to science. I mean, I'm really proud of that, because my oldest son was much more interested in, he was interested in math and he was much more a—not someone who was really focused on the human dimension but in terms of really being responsible and doing a careful job, and he ended up at a firm that used to be called Alliance Bernstein and now it's called Bernstein. It was one of the companies that did a great deal of work with equity funds. So at one point he explained to me that the equity fund that he was totally in charge of had assets that were over a billion dollars. Well, what does that require? [Laughs] I mean, I realized how proud I was of my kids, because they both got the core thing that really was an issue going back to Strauss. And it had nothing to do with thinking that they're Straussians, because they're not Straussians. But understanding that you have to combine knowledge and the ethical implications of knowledge and the needs of the world is something that is so foreign to almost everything, and it's the center of Strauss's work.

GM: Yeah. That might be a good place to pause now. That's great. Do you mind if I take your photograph?

[end of interview]

Interview with Roger Masters

November 15, 2017

Revised by Roger Masters

Gayle McKeen: This is Gayle McKeen here with Roger Masters. And he is going to start talking about Leo Strauss.

Roger Masters: My history is that I grew up in Greater Boston, and I went to Newton High School (one of the best high schools in Massachusetts), where studying in the college preparation "track" was like going to a prep school. And then I went to Harvard. Since my father had gone to Harvard and I was a straight A student at Newton High, the first college to which I applied was Harvard. I had no trouble getting in. I found Harvard very congenial and graduated summa cum laude. As a freshman, I got to know the master of Adams House (Joseph Palamountain) a little bit in a class, so I applied to Adams House for upper class residence because Jo was the house's Master, aand he was interested in teaching of regulating big businesses under the Sherman Antitrust Act. When I was a freshman, I took a course with an economist named Carl Kaysen, who was a rigorous, demanding teacher who taught the economic theory of big businesses under the Sherman Antitrust Act (and after my graduation, Carl ended up on the Council of Economic Advisors in Washington). Joe Palamountain was smart too, but he wasn't as demanding and aggressive as Carl. Those two professors were my advisors for a thesis on the economic and political theories underlying the Sherman Antitrust Act in which I connected the economics of market behavior with the politics of antitrust regulation.

In retrospect, I've realized that throughout my career, connecting different perspectives has always been the critical thing in my research. Several years ago, when I was interviewed for inclusion in a book called *101 Top Industry Experts* (Uniondale, NY: Who's Who Publishers, 2012), my biography was apparently put first with "Executive Spotlight" for that reason. Although it's now rare that academics have this interdisciplinary perspective, it's been central to my research and publication. And since my retirement, I've focused on a new field called biology and politics (and most recently on scientific research linking neurotoxicology with human health and behavior). Many of my publications in this area were coauthored with the late Myron J. Coplan, an industrial chemist who asked me to collaborate with him in studying the public policy implications of treating the water supplies of over 140 million Americans with either of two untested neurotoxins (H_2SiF_6 or Na_2SiF_6). It will probably not be a surprise that most of my colleagues in political science have ignored this work and that a few have openly criticized me for it.

Perhaps more telling, although I have remained quite active and received national recognition since my retirement in 1998, my existence has been consistently ignored by the Department of Government and the Dean of the Faculty. For example, in 1999-2000, I received an Earhart Foundation grant to study the toxic effects of lead. Then, with two colleagues—Lionel Tiger (anthropologist) and Michael T. McGuire (primatologist)—I

was Principal Investigator in a series of consulting projects for Andrew Marshall, Director of the Office of Net Assessment (i.e., long range planning) at the Department of Defense. This project (which involved relevance of biological factors in the Defense Department's future planning) was actively funded for the academic years 1999-2000, 2000-2001 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2005-2006 2007-2009, and 2011-2013. As Principal Investigator, I was responsible for managing the funds for nine calendar years that were in the form of grants that provided Dartmouth College with about $80,000 in indirect costs (even though there was no added Dartmouth expense since the other two consultants worked at home and when the three of us met, it was always in New York City). Despite this contribution as well as my continued publications, several requests that a lecture on my work be scheduled were flatly refused. It should be quite evident that even though my approach linking contemporary biological research to political decisions had support from the legendary Andrew Marshall, the highest long range planner at the Pentagon, my work was openly ignored at Dartmouth College.

Was the area of this project different from sociobiology, which was a popular field in what was the 1970s and 1980s? No, it's not entirely different from sociobiology, because we integrated biological research from observational reports on social behavior in groups of monkeys and apes (the research field of Michael McGuire), the relevance of biological research to theories in anthropology (Lionel Tiger), and to public policy decisions as well as political science (my perspective). There is overlap between all of these areas of the life sciences and "sociobiology," the approach named and created by Edward O. Wilson of Harvard to describe research linking biological theories of animal behavior with social scientific studies of human behavior. Our work is a good example of the approach I've been taking, and I got to know Ed personally as a result.

So my work is not different from Wilson's sociobiology, but that's not the point. The field of biology includes a wide variety of subfields, just as mathematics includes algebra, geometry, statistics, etc. There are many different theories and research methods in biology, starting with both mathematical theories and descriptive research on the evolution of species as well as the specific theories and descriptive research for the evolution of different kinds of living things (from trees to fruit flies), and the similar range of theories and research on different kinds of primates (which include monkeys and apes, whose social groups are among those akin to human social groups). McGuire's research included important studies at the level of observing social behavior in monkeys but were extended to humans in my research on the social effects of facial displays of emotion in human groups, and in current politics. In addition, however, there are studies of human biology that include the nature and function of specific chemicals that pay a major role in the brains of both primates and humans, a level I mention specifically because Lionel Tiger, Mike McGuire and I have all focused a great deal on the simarlities and differences of the role of specific neurotransmitters (like dopamine for learning or serotonin for positive emotions).

I need to get back to Ed Wilson's concept of "sociobiology" as a way to show the direct theoretical relevance of similar approaches in different subfields within biology to both animal and human behavior. Some of the work in this field considers the genetic and behavioral factors in group behavior, and how they are both similar and different when comparing different animal species to each other or to humans. Neuroscientists study

brain chemicals (notably "neurotransmitters" that are linked to specific responses and behaviors), with important similarities between non-human primates (chimpanzees, monkeys, and apes) and humans, though each group of species or individual species may have some unique chemical processes. Recently, one of the things I considered as a way to encourage political scientists to pay attention to biology was the announcement that the entire human genome had been decoded. While this procedure now costs a lot of money, every gene in an individual can be decoded and this information is increasingly relevant to the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. In addition, however, experience indicates that the price of an initially expensive technology usually falls, and valuable new uses for it are discovered. Therefore we can predict that whether it's in ten or twenty years, but perhaps even sooner, it will cost as little as a hundred dollars to decode a person's genome. And at that point, every infant's genome will probably be decoded at birth because genetic information will be increasingly important in healthcare (and even in treating dysfunctional behaviors from learning disabilities to Alzheimer's disease).

Now I have to go back to "sociobiology" as the field that links biology to the study of human social behavior. *For the non-specialists, this is the most important topic of all.* Since the application of Darwin's theory of evolution to the origin of the human species has been now fully documented as matter of science, consideration of the similarities between group behaviors of chimpanzees and primitive humans is as scientifically legitimate as the comparisons of these behaviors in chimpanzees compared to the same behaviors in rhesus monkeys. The controversies triggered by Ed Wilson's *Sociobiology* reflect the highly negative reaction of many social scientists and popular writers who express opposition to any linkage between studies of other animals to research on humans.

Why was there such a negative reaction? Discussing public hostility is different from scientific hostility. The reaction of the general public to the scientific developments discussed above was generally to ignore it: most Americans don't follow science in part because they think they can't possibly understand it, and in part because they are scared by science. But also, even more important is the religious opposition to science. After all, the scientific theory that humans evolved from non-human species like monkeys seems to be totally hostile to the biblical account of God's creation of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis.

Actually, there is *no* contradiction at all between the account in Genesis and modern science; at least there is none if the Old Testament is read without reference to any modern theological doctrines. In the Old Testament, God (also called "Yahweh") is the eternal, purely spiritual creator of heaven and earth in seven days. The conventional understanding of this text makes no sense: if God created heaven and earth in seven days, then one thing must be admitted. A "day" for Yahweh (the Creator God) could not conceivably be twenty-four hours long. Time on earth is based on the solar system, but at the beginning there is no solar system. Moreover, since Yahweh the Creator God is eternal, what Genesis calls a "day" of creation could very well be the equivalent of a trillion years in the system of counting time by the movement of the sun and earth. Moreover, if God is perceived from this perspective, there is no reason that God couldn't use the process of natural selection and evolution to produce humans. To think that it's possible to *know* that God's creation of Adam on a single day of Creation was an action

that took less than twenty-four hours is blasphemy. That is, there is an understanding of the text of Genesis that is completely consistent with modern natural science—or, more precisely, modern natural science is completely consistent with this careful reading of Genesis without theological predispositions (which are post-biblical *beliefs*).

We should avoid the problem of science and religion altogether, and focus instead on the opposition to introducing any biological theories or findings into the field of political science, which was primarily a matter of fear. This is a good idea, and it's useful to see how fear is involved in hostility to use contemporary biology to explain human social behavior. For example, recently one of the things I considered as a way to encourage political scientists to pay attention to biology was the announcement that the entire human genome had been decoded. While this procedure now costs a lot of money, since every gene in an individual can now be reliably decoded, this information will be increasingly relevant to the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. In addition, however, experience indicates that the price of an initially expensive technology usually falls and valuable new uses for it are discovered. Therefore we can predict that whether it's in ten or twenty years, but perhaps even sooner, it will cost as little as a hundred dollars to decode a person's genome. And at that point, every infant's genome will probably be decoded at birth because genetic information will be so important in healthcare (and even in treating dysfunctional behaviors from learning disabilities to Alzheimer's disease).

This knowledge of the influence of human genetics on an individual's health and behavior will, however, create a new question: "Who owns your genes?" That is, how should this information about an individual's genetics be used? As I recently have explained to some colleagues at Dartmouth, the academic professions that ought to be concerned with such issues will probably include political scientists. Why? The issue will concern the need for laws and medical practices that regulate possible uses of genetic information that challenge the principle of the "natural rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" that are at the foundation of the American regime.

Recently I made a suggestion to this effect in a conversation on a street corner and was overheard by several people, one of whom was a colleague in the department of government who is a specialist in comparative politics. This professor filed a formal complaint against me in a manner that violated the Dartmouth College's rules concerning such complaints. To be pursued, a complaint has to be written; the person who is the target of complaint has to be informed of the complaint and the requisite procedures, and if there is a hearing or a meeting in the Dean's office about this, this faculty member needs to be warned in advance so that he or she can bring a lawyer or some other ally to this meeting.

The procedure in my case was different. One day, without prior warning, I received a telephone call asking whether I could be in the dean's office at a specific time on March 6, 2014. I had no idea why I was being called there, none. I walked into the dean's office and was surprised to see another professor from my department sitting there. Why, I wondered, was this professor in the dean's office? The dean told me: The professor has filed a complaint against you. And so this woman said the whole problem was that I was trying to change completely how she—and everybody in our department—taught and she went on for a while about how I was trying to require all professors of government to

understand and teach this stuff about biology. And there was one other thing she wanted to complain about. I used the word "fuck."

This was an outrageous charge, since all I did was to say (that's covered by the First Amendment) that it would be useful if at least one member of the department was familiar with contemporary biology, and I think I referred to the way decoding the human genome created a political and legal issue over who "owns" or controls the right to use this genetic information. Without any advance warning about the charge against me, all I had was this oral reply which denied I was trying to change how she taught, a claim that was simply false.

GM: In the conversation that she overheard on the street, or in another context?

RM: My critic didn't say when or where the supposed comments were said.

GM: Oh, that wasn't stated?

RM: Since everything for which this complaint was filed concerned things I *said* in either speech or writing, it all had to do with the First Amendment and the freedom of scientific research. Every bit of it. And while I was after listening to this charge, and then the dean's decision supporting that charge and formally punishing me, I said to myself: I could contest this action, but I'm not going to waste my time. It'll occupy me for at least a half a year, and what's more, to get this administrative action by the dean of the faculty reversed I would probably need appeal his decision sequentially to the committee advisory to the President, if denied to the President, and if rejected to the Board of Trustees, and perhaps ultimately to the Alumni Association, since I'm an honorary member of the Dartmouth class of '45. If the dean supports my critic (I think I thought about this after the dean did so), if I follow the procedure of the sequential appeals just described and all these institutional bodies maintain the dean's decision, I might just take this whole case to the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment of the Humanities and the newspapers, and request that Dartmouth College be punished for a blatant violation of both freedom of speech and the rules in the Dartmouth Handbook. Then I said to myself: How can I do that? The College has been nice to me. I realized that this particular professor is probably scared to death that somebody would ask if the charge against me was based on knowledge about something specific in human biology, and the dean might well have been scared not to support my critic. I quickly decided that I'm not going to let them foul up my life. Since I'm over 80 years old, having survived cancer, a stroke, and three seizures, I still have important research and publications to do and don't have to spend time fighting mediocre professors. So I said to the dean: Look, I have important research to do. If you don't want me around here, I don't need to talk to people who don't want to listen to my research findings

GM: And that was the end of it?

RM: The punishment was that I could no longer teach students, I could no longer apply for a research grant through the College, and I could no longer have an office on the Dartmouth campus. This was 2015. Since I retired in 1997 and have had a long and distinguished career, I can continue to conduct research as an independent scholar: there's no reason to waste time over what was originally a trivial anti-scientific complaint

by a social scientist that was enforced by a dean of the faculty (in violation of both American law and Dartmouth's rules).

GM: There was no formal hearing?

RM: The meeting in the dean's office (which was not the "formal hearing" and was the only "informal" hearing) didn't follow the procedures described in the Dartmouth Faculty Handbook.

GM: No other evidence was brought forward?

RM: There was no evidence at all: simply a verbal report of my spoken words. As I've said, this procedure on March 6, 2014 violated both the Dartmouth College rules concerning a faculty member's free speech (and freedom of research) and the principle in the First Amendment to the Constitution. Actually, a disciplinary action concerning my *behavior* might have been appropriate during an earlier period after my retirement. There was a time when every time I was on the Dartmouth campus, my behavior was often highly irrational and disruptive: frequent emotional explosions, often directed at other members of the Department of Government, and an absence of any contribution to scholarship either on campus or in publications. This occurred after I suffered a stroke followed by three seizures. The behavior, after the first of these seizures, turned out to be a negative reaction to a medication called keppra; once ended, these behaviors disappeared.

I'd like to get back to my personal history at that time. Because you've just been beginning to get some idea of the particularity of how I think, I'd like to give you the background of my career and then go through in detail the years since the events just described. The years since my retirement have been in some ways the most productive time in my life, and I have hopes that I'll have been able to contribute something of lasting benefit to our country. When I explain what I've been doing in retirement, however, it will seem totally inexplicable how a student of Mr. Strauss would find the "most productive time" of his life writing technical scientific articles on the general topic of "Toxins, Health, and Behavior"! Moreover, I attribute why Mr. Strauss's teaching reinforce my decision to abandon the transfer my scholarly energies from political philosophy (with primary attention to Rousseau and Machiavelli) to analyzing the effects of exposure to four neurotoxins that have harmful effects on brain chemistry and behavior, greatly increasing rates of learning disabilities, substance abuse, and violent crime.

It will be extremely useful to explain why my studies with Mr. Strauss played a central role in this apparently irrational abandonment of political philosophy by focusing most of my research and publication on such technical scientific fields as ethology, neurotoxicology and the scientific study of dysfunctional behavior. Actually, this change occurred in two important steps, the first of which (in 1969) was directly linked to the scientific challenge to the concept of the state of nature in the famous works of Hobbes (*Leviathan*, chapter 13), Locke and Rousseau (*Second* Discourse, part 1), the triad of thinkers who played a major role in the transition from hereditary monarchy to republican government in Western political systems. This challenge was based on recent scientific research on human evolution and the observational studies of social groups, some of

which have a dominance hierarchy, among primate species from howler monkeys to chimpanzees or gorilla. Because these scientific studies directly contradicted the diverse descriptions of the state of nature in Hobbes (a "war of all against all" in the *Leviathan*) with behavior and understanding based on external circumstances, and Rousseau (men "alone idle, and always near danger," concerned only with "self-preservation" and feeling "pity"—*Second Discourse*, part 1). Precisely because Strauss focused on the importance of taking the text of major philosophers seriously as inquiries seeking truth, the observation of animal groups more peaceful than Hobbes's state of nature or more sociable than Rousseau's state of nature had an unexpected implication. While typical undergraduate courses in political theory often imply that the development of modern political philosophy entailed the shift to more reasonable understanding human nature and the natural sociability of man.

The second change was the shift to the study of toxins, brain chemistry, and neurotoxic chemicals on the brain.

[Here Masters returns to the earlier narrative, taking up his military career.]

RM: When I graduated from Newton High School in '51, I could have been drafted, but I applied for the deferment to go to college. You could get such a deferment, but draft boards usually didn't allow another deferment for graduate school immediately after college. Moreover, I realized that in any case, even if I could have been deferred again, I wanted to get my military service out of the way, because after graduate school I wanted to be able to go on with my career. Also, since the U.S. was at peace, it seemed a good time to go in the army. I was sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey, where after Basic Training I was trained as an intermediate speed radio operator.

GM: Intermediate speed? Is that what you said?

RM: Intermediate speed. That was a measure of the speed you could send Morse code. The Army's radio operators needed to know how to type the dots and dashes of Morse code at a very rapid speed. This is hard to do but necessary for warfare, because in battle it would sometimes be necessary to send long messages back to headquarters from the front lines. Many people can send Morse code very slowly, but it's hard to learn how to send these messages at what's called intermediate speed (I forget how many words per minute were involved). Once I was successfully trained to do this, I was assigned to an artillery unit. For a radio operator, at the front lines in warfare this was a very dangerous job. At least one radio operator in every unit had to be able to go out beyond the enemy lines to radio back with Morse code where the enemy targets were. And then there was a radio operator behind the battle lines who decoded the message. This meant that during a battle in warfare, you were likely to be going out behind enemy lines about half the time. That was a nice, safe job. [Laughs] But when we were at peace these considerations weren't a problem.

I was assigned to an antiaircraft battalion at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas. When I got to Fort Bliss, however, my unit was specialized in antiaircraft weapons, but there weren't any antiaircraft guns. Fort Bliss had just been opened, and the Army had to assign a lot of troops there (apparently to satisfy the Congressmen from Texas who wanted these troops to provide more business to the merchants in El Paso). A group of us who'd been

together training at Fort Dix arrived on a sunny Texas weekend. With nothing to do, we were assigned ditch digging in the hot sun. Monday morning, I had to go to the Orderly Room for something and found a heavy-set First Sargent laboriously typing with one finger on a large Royal business typewriter. Considering the alternative of more ditch digging, I ignored the universal advice to "Never Volunteer in the Army" and said: "Hey Sarge, I can type." Sargent Henry Savoca, a hefty guy with many years in the army and a great personality, had me behind that typewriter in a matter of seconds, and there I was to spend the rest of my military service in an air-conditioned office in the new cinder-block building.

A final word on my military experience. As the Battery Clerk, there were often forms to fill or references to specific Department of Defense policies, but sometimes neither the Commanding Officer nor First Sargent knew the details. I realized that whenever there was anything that had to do with rules, I could just look up the rules in the Army Regulations. That turned out to be valuable. Because by that time I was married, and since I had permission to live with my wife just outside Ft. Bliss, sometimes it was possible for us to spend a weekend camping in New Mexico. As a result, for me the army for me was a wonderful way of learning about bureaucracy. At the end of my two years of military service, it was the beginning of the summer term when we arrived at the University of Chicago, where I embarked on graduate studies in political science without having a clear idea of the area in this field that would become my specialization.

GM: Had someone told you about Chicago and encouraged you to apply there? How was it that you decided?

RM: During my senior year of college, I'd applied to several outstanding graduate programs. All I remember is when the University of Chicago accepted me (before Harvard's graduation), my fiancé agreed that spending several years in the Midwest after my army service would be interesting.

GM: And was this in the late 1950's or early 60's?

RM: I graduated from Harvard in 1955, started my graduate studies in summer of 1957. This was my situation: I had graduated from Harvard summa cum laude, and had been away from studying for two years. As noted above, my undergraduate thesis was on the connection between economic theory and political science in administering America's antitrust policies. So in Chicago I assumed I would focus on some areas where political decision in the United States had to deal with things that had not previously been relevant. This meant I wanted to study political science broadly, sampling courses on a variety of subjects (including both international politics and domestic policymaking.

When I registered for the first time in the summer quarter of 1955 (Chicago had the year-round, fall/winter/spring/summer academic quarters), I was eager to go to work. I took the usual three courses and recall one, taught by a well-known professor named David Easton, who had developed something called "Systems Theory," which sounded at first pretty interesting. Professor Easton was one of those who initiated this approach, which he described by drawing a square (the "system") on the blackboard, with an input (an arrow pointing to the left side of the square), and an output for what the system did (an

arrow pointing away from the right side of the square), with a dotted curve from the arrow on the right, under the box, and over to the input arrow (a line which stood for "feedback"). I soon realized this supposedly innovative "theory" was just a "model" (or frame of reference) listing the input to the political system, the decisions or outputs of that system, and feedback (effects of the decision that have unexpected effects on the society or change the responses to future inputs. Compared to the economic and political theories in my undergraduate honors thesis, this "theory" seemed so simple it was not worth extensive study.

In the fall term of the 1957-58 school year, things changed. I took a political theory course because it was a requirement in the one year M.A. program in which I was enrolled. My first course in political theory was taught by Professor Leo Strauss, and after that experience there was only one thing I was going to study: political philosophy. No question about it.

GM: It's remarkable that everyone who has been interviewed by either me or my predecessor has said very similar things. Yes.

RM: Well, it was probably the admission key to writing a doctoral dissertation on which Professor Leo Strauss was your advisor, an experience to which I owe the blessing of a successful academic career and a happy adult life. But it's important to realize that this manner of reading and teaching necessarily exposes a professor to the risk of ostracism or punishment for violating the accepted beliefs and moral standards of your community, be it either the country where one lives or the academic specialty in which one teaches and publishes. These potential conflicts arise from adopting Strauss's mode of reading since the "esoteric" level of meaning concerns a thinker's view of truths that contradict widely accepted conventions and thus can elicit hostility from political, religious, or cultural conformists. Careful study of the major thinkers in the history of political philosophy makes this obvious. First the ancients—the whole obvious point of Plato's *Republic* was what happened to Socrates because he was constantly asking questions that many Athenians didn't like. Similar things happen in contemporary politics as was illustrated by the career of Senator Joseph McCarthy's attacks on professors or journalists as subversives. After my experiences in the army, I realized that if I couldn't understand what Strauss meant by an "esoteric" level of speech then I should decide to be a truck driver.

But it was so exciting to discover that I could devote my career to studying political philosophers at the level of meaning that give their works relevance to our contemporary world. You have no idea how exciting it was to liberate political philosophers from the relegation to mere historical figures. Nothing else mattered to me at that point.

During my first year of graduate study in Chicago, when I decided to write my doctoral dissertation on the political philosophy of Rousseau, it was important that Judith had been a French major at Goucher College. As I recall, Strauss had remarked on the poor quality of available English translations and I realized it was necessary to learn to read and speak French fluently. After my choice of my thesis topic, we decided to spend the next year in France as I began work on my thesis while also translating Rousseau's *First and Second*

Discourses. Judith was invaluable both as my teacher of French and as a partner in getting to know Rousseau's text literally word for word.

After the first year of graduate study in Chicago, therefore, I spent the year 1958-1959 in France, where I'd technically be an auditor at the Institute d'Etudes Politiques in Paris (locally called Science Po), learning to be thoroughly bilingual as we started our translation while we also enjoyed the pleasures of Paris. Before getting to work, however, during the summer we rented a Vespa and with the spirit of adventure of toured around France on roads with relatively few cars between cities and other tourist attractions. Compared to driving from El Paso to Chicago or from Chicago to Boston, on that Vespa we really felt *in the French countryside.*

During the rest of the year, we lived in Paris where I worked on my doctoral dissertation, except for some wonderful vacations, as I recall, going back to Provence to visit the city of Arles and discovering a nearby village called Maussane where we were told about a house owned by the wife (Joanna Kilmartin) of the literary editor (Terry Kilmartin) of the *London Observer.* This was a house they wanted to rent because they used it only on English vacations. That discovery turned out to be excellent for us: a wonderful and inexpensive house in a beautiful area of France where we could plan to spend time whenever it was possible for me to finance a year in France. Our rental was mutually beneficial, since Joanna was glad to have good tenants for long periods (making some money from her vacation house). When the Kilmartin family took their vacations in Maussane, we travelled for our vacation. Later, for three different years, we rented that house and our boys (Seth and Will) spend the year going to the local schools.

In Chicago, we lived not far from the campus, and it was a wonderful time for us, because life in Chicago was just terrific. We lived on the south side of campus near the lake, and took advantage of a picnic and swim on hot summer days. Chicago had interesting night clubs like the Second City, where we enjoyed some of the best jazz musicians in the country; enjoyed camping in Wisconsin; and frequently sampled good food (and especially the good steak) in the Loop. But above all, for me the years in Chicago gave me not only the diploma needed for college teaching, but the focus and training that has given direction to my career.

It's important to emphasize that I didn't go to the University of Chicago to study with Leo Strauss at all. In fact, I didn't go the Chicago with the intention of specializing in political philosophy, and don't remember even having heard Strauss's name. I didn't know much of anything about anybody. After my first course with Strauss led me to decide to work in the area of political philosophy, I realized that I had to pick a thesis topic, and I was interested in various theorists. At that point, my wife had really done a lot of work in French, and she wondered whether she would enjoy becoming a French teacher. In those conversations, I realized that I'd never studied French, though I took several years of Spanish in high school, actually learned to speak it, but had never done anything with it. But in reading various political theorists, I thought Rousseau was fascinating and he wrote in French, and Judith thought Rousseau's writings were interesting because we talked about them. And before too long, though I forget when, we decided that since I was working on a thesis on Rousseau and she had nothing to do, she

would translate, and I suggested we start with the *First and Second Discourses*,[10] because the *First Discourse* or *Discourse on Arts and Letters* is relevant in contemporary society. Rousseau's work has the following full title on the original published edition: *Discourse Which Won the Prize of the Academy of Dijon in the year 1750 On the Question proposed by that Academy: Has the restoration of the sciences and arts tended to purify morals?* Although the question was posed expecting essays answering yes, Rousseau's essay answers a resounding no—and that not only won the prize, it also launched his career. What I found fascinating is that the question and Rousseau's answer are both highly relevant when considering contemporary developments in the sciences and arts (which include technology) have resulted in moral corruption. This criticism of the cultural practices we consider the basis of "modern" society was a very explosive book when it was published in 1751 (and it's still explosive 267 years later). How could activities in which we take pride actually have bad effects?

Well, you know, it took a long time. In fact, I have the clearest recollection of this, actually not long ago, suddenly realizing what it was like for Rousseau in some detail. I never really put myself into Rousseau's shoes, but why did Rousseau write anything? Well, he was a printer's apprentice in Geneva, with its Calvinist doctrines and behavioral standards, and he was somebody who loved to just wander off and pick the daisies, and the only time he could get out of the city was on Sunday after the church service. And he would stay outside he city walls after they blew a bugle (I think at 4:00 PM) when you had to go back inside the city's walls because they locked the gates. On two occasions Rousseau had been so far away picking the daisies that he didn't get back in time. So he slept out under the walls, and then as soon as they opened the door in the morning he went back to the print shop, and the printer was furious that his apprentice was late, and spanked him or hit him or something. And that happened twice, and the third time it happened, Jean-Jacques said: I'm not going to go back and let that guy beat me up. He took off, nothing on his back. And I don't think people, when they study Rousseau, ever thought that his walking from Geneva to Paris with a little stay in Chambéry, where he had a little affair, but the main thing is not that he discovered sexuality, which is not a bad thing to do, but anyway, that he had this experience of walking alone across Europe. What an astounding experience! And seeing the difference between the little villages where people would invite him in and give him a meal and stuff like that, and then walking up to Paris, this incredible city, center of, intellectual life, you know? Well, then he sees the filth of the city compared to the pretty other—all of the is embedded in his experience walking from Geneva to Paris. And I have found that really fascinating, because I don't think enough people have paid attention to what it's like to walk that kind of distance. Good health: healthy mind, healthy body.

But anyway, I was entranced by Rousseau, and we translated him and we ended up translating the *First and Second Discourses*, then another volume, the *Social Contract*,[11] then I ended up even after Judith was a social worker co-editing with Chris Kelly at Boston College the Collected Writings. So I had then published my thesis, "Political

[10] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, trans. Judith R. Masters, ed. Roger D. Masters (Bedford/St. Martins, 1969).
[11] *On the Social Contract*, trans. Judith R. Masters, ed. Roger D. Masters (St. Martins, 1978).

Philosophy of Rousseau," so it was after all the thesis that I did under Strauss. So my first really major publication was as a Straussian.

But as I continued to work, while there was no question that whenever I studied anything theoretical, I was looking at it as Strauss did. That when I did that, I saw other things, and one of the things I always saw was an understanding of human nature, which people always talked about. But that now, there was this huge thing when I read Robert Ardrey's *African Genesis*.[12]

GM: Robert, what's the last name?

RM: Ardrey, A-R-D-R-E-Y. Now, Bob, I got to know Bob a little bit. I met him a number of times. Bob was just a writer who was sort of interested in popularizing things, and he thought all this stuff that was being done by these anthropologists who went to Africa and studied what these animal groups were like in the chimpanzees and so forth, and that this was revolutionary in terms of the understanding of society. I mean, it's what gave rise to that book by Edward O. Wilson. And when Edward O. Wilson published *Sociobiology,*[13] I therefore bought it. And I got to know Ed particularly once I got back to Boston. Ed was such a brilliant man but he's very steady, mild mannered, not in the slightest flamboyant, and I think he was astounded that this book had so much of an effect. But the fact is that intellectually the time was ripe to break down the social sciences. When I think back on it, I never thought about it at the time, because the disaster of the Cold War from the point of view of American society was that we had always been an isolationist society until the First World War. And in the First World War, Wilson realized that the Germans really controlled everything in Europe there might be some real problems for the United States. It was better to side with the democracies, so we had to get into the war. We had such a strong relationship with England in particular, we couldn't allow the Germans to control England. And he got Americans to agree to do that, and the First World War was a terrifying experience for Americans because it was so brutal. Trench warfare; we lost so many troops that after the war in the 20's the basic feeling was we should have nothing to do with this kind of thing again. We've saved Europe, okay, and then after all the 20's were, everywhere in the industrialized world: Let's have peace and quiet, we'll just mind our own business. And then the market economy collapsed in '29 so that we had this whole new era which didn't happen until FDR got elected, and that completely changed American society domestically but increased the notion that we should have nothing to do with any other country; we had to solve our own problems.

And it was during that period in the late '30's that the America First movement was founded. And this was important for me only because in my life, one of the fundamental things about the America First movement was they were very strongly antisemitic. Very strongly antisemitic, and in fact, one reason for that was that the two people who founded it, Henry Ford and Charles Lindberg, were antisemites, and so they were in favor of the final solution. And I knew about that much more than almost anybody you have ever talked to, because my mother, because the Jews that escaped the Holocaust came to—one

[12] *African Genesis: A Personal Investigation into the Animal Origins and Nature of Man* (1961).
[13] E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Harvard University Press, 1975).

of the major ports if not the major port was Boston, where we were living. And the National Council of Jewish Women would send a group of women to each boat with a manifest, so they knew the names of every family on that boat. My mother was in charge of that because she was a terrific organizer, and so she had the permit to go out at the foot of the gangplank. Families would come down one at a time, she'd take them through customs, she knew Yiddish so she could use that, she could translate for them, get them through customs, then she'd go back and get another family. The family got out the other side, there was always a woman who had from the manifest the name of the family, took them to her house. For these families, this welcome meant that on their first night in the U.S. they would to be in a private home. The last family to get off the boat always came to our house. And my first memory in life at age six is playing on our red living room rug with those little metal cars with one or two kids. I couldn't say a word in German, they couldn't speak English. I get very emotional. I knew they were safe.

And because we'd followed the rise of Hitler very carefully in our family, my mother was just very active, my father was—there was no question a very close attention, association with being Jewish, and it really was important to me after that point to pay attention to this issue of religion and how important freedom was in America and how lucky we were to be here. But also there was antisemitism. I'm one of the last generation of people I think you'll meet who was knocked down, spit on and called a dirty Jew on the way going to school. And I just learned to avoid those people and that was the end of that. And then in high school, taking an algebra class, and next to me, the row sitting next to me, there was a football player. He was a tackle. I remember his name, Nick Babo. Nice guy. But one day he leans over to me, we got a problem and it's a quiz, and he says [whispers], "I can't do it, I can't do it. They'll throw me off the team." He was afraid that if he flunked he'd get thrown off the football team and the football team was what counted to him. I said, "See me after class." So I went on the bench right after that class, and I showed Nick how to do it one step at a time, it wasn't that hard. So we were always sitting together.

GM: So you were his tutor.

RM: Nobody touched me. [Laughs] They would have to fight Nick.

GM: Very good.

RM: I didn't do it for that reason, though. But it's one of these incredibly funny things that just happens. And one of the things you learn to do, by the way, and it's interesting because when I came to Dartmouth, one of the things that happened to me when I was here was funny, because when I graduated from high school I wouldn't apply to Dartmouth because it was reputed to be antisemitic. But when I was teaching at Yale as a non-tenured assistant professor, I realized that I better look for a tenured position, because you can never be sure whether you're getting tenure and the best thing to do is to line one up, and then if they weren't going to try and keep you then get out of there before you were on the market with no place to go. And I went to a number of places, but my wife and I came up to Hanover and in three milliseconds she said I want to live here. [Laughs] Much nicer than—she wanted to bring our kids up to the country and out of New Haven. And so we came up here, and when I started teaching, not long after I started teaching, one of the first black people on the faculty got hired. Not in my department, in

English, Bill Cook.[14] And I remember this because there was a service in memoriam of Bill in the last year, which I went to because I got to know Bill, and I remember afterwards talking to people in his family and commenting on the fact that there was a lot of discussion about his coming here and racism. And I said: You know that I had a special relationship with your father or your grandfather or whatever, your uncle. And I explained that we got to know each other because we were the two groups that were outsiders.

I explained to his relatives at this meeting that Bill and I both understood, and we didn't have to talk about it, we knew it, and we may have talked about it a couple times: the trick was you just do your job. Don't make waves, just do your job and be useful for doing your job and people leave you alone, which is what I did in the army and it worked fine. The younger kids in his family were interested in how simple that was. Of course, it was important to me to stay here because I liked it here and my wife liked it and the kids liked it, and so I was glad that I got to stay here. And I mean, I started working on Rousseau—oh, I was going to look at my CV but I don't really have to, I guess. It's just that the, I got some things in here, in this thing here I've got a CV.

But the point is that my career, starting at Yale, became first of all a way in which I could make a mark writing about Rousseau and then political theorists. But secondly, I was always doing something else. The first memory I have about Yale was that I lived in a house that was not far from the campus on something called Cannon Street, and just around the corner about a block, block and a half away, there was a park called East Rock Park. A huge red cliff with a little stream that came by at the foot of it and then a playground there, and it was a wonderful place to go because you could walk through, you could picnic there, and because of this cliff they could never put a road through there. So we used to go picnicking, and then all the sudden the state highway department announced they were going to put an access road between this new interstate, I-91, and one of the main north-south roads from the suburbs to downtown New Haven—since, like most coastal cities, there's a web of broad roads out to suburbs from the center of town. And one of them was not far from that rock, so they were going to put a connector from the interstate to one of the main north-south roads from the suburbs to downtown New Haven. And I thought it was just insane to destroy that beautiful park.

GM: Were they just going to blast the rock away?

RM: No, they couldn't blast the rock. It was it was about as tall as the Empire State Building.

GM: Oh, a huge cliff.

RM: Huge cliff. So I had a neighbor, Bill Knorr, who was in the divinity school but just lived down the street, I think he was involved with the city council in some way. But I had a conversation with him; I said: This is crazy for them to put—this is a priceless park. And he said yeah. And I said: I think I'll start a group to try and protest it. So before I knew it I was the chairman of the Save the Park Committee, and I stopped the highway

[14] William W. Cook (1933-2017), Israel Evans Professor of Oratory and Belles Lettres at Dartmouth College.

department. [Laughs] Because the mayor was behind me, everybody was behind me, I had the city behind me, and the highway department finally decided there was no point in fighting when you've got people in the legislature who say you shouldn't destroy that park. We'll make another connector,

which they connected further out of town, which was better anyway, and it didn't matter. But suddenly I was really involved in practical politics, because it was fun and I enjoyed it. But I really began working hard on Rousseau and also I started to write other things. You see that my CV starts very early branching out into other areas.

GM: There's a trajectory there, though, I think: Rousseau, Tocqueville, and democratic participation.

RM: Well, Rousseau is the big key. We tend to forget how embedded he was, and just as my experience of getting out of the Greater Boston community and the Jewish community, first encountering Strauss in Chicago—no, first getting in the army, but then encountering Strauss in Chicago and discovering there was this other new world. My coming to Chicago was a little bit like Rousseau coming to Paris, though I never thought of myself that way. I look back now and say yes, because just as Rousseau encountered Diderot and it was "wow." Last night it occurred to me if Rousseau is walking between Geneva and Chambéry, and he met somebody who was a gypsy who actually could read the future. Doesn't exist, but say it did exist, and the gypsy said, "You know, Jean-Jacques, you're going to be one of the most famous people coming out of Geneva of this century. Two hundred years from now, everybody will know your name. He says: "What?" You'll be a famous political philosopher. What's that? He wouldn't have known what political philosophy was, and he wouldn't have believed that he'd be famous. You know? Such an astounding change for him when he encountered the *philosophes* in Paris. And in particular, when he encountered the *philosophes* with this idea that compared to Geneva this place is rotten, it's dirty, a lot of people are cheating each other. We're not like that in Geneva. You know? So he writes that up in this little essay competition and wow, wins the prize, to his astonishment. And he's suddenly a world historical figure.

GM: Right.

RM: And it happens fast. And somehow what I did first, because Judith wanted to have something to do in New Haven, was we translated the Discourses. And the book was very successful. It was so successful.

GM: Generations have benefited from your notes, as well.

RM: The point is that I wasn't just a translator, aand that's Strauss. I mean, without Strauss I never would have done that. And my whole career, therefore, that's why Strauss's picture is there. [Gestures to a photo of Strauss on a nearby shelf] Every once in a while I say "Thanks, Leo." He did so much for me, and the point is that in general, I didn't have any personal contact with him in my courses.

GM: What do you mean?

RM: I was terrified.

GM: Oh, I see. You never went to talk with him.

RM: I never thought I was smart enough. He was still obviously working on his own work, and I didn't think that it was appropriate to bother him because I didn't think—I mean, I understood what was going on very well. I mean, I got good grades, and I never went to his office until I was—I'm trying to remember when it was when I went to his office, but it blew my mind, because it was then that he addressed me as if I could do important political theory. I remember because I think I already had a job lined up.

GM: And so you were writing your dissertation at the time?

RM: Yeah, but I wanted to talk to him about a teaching career as well as my thesis, and so I talked with him. I said, "You know, I'm very concerned about teaching and want to make sure I'd do a good job." And he said, "That's easy. Always assume there's a silent student in class who knows more than you do." It never left me.

GM: Yes. So presumably when you were devising a thesis topic and he was your supervisor, you must have had some conversations with him about what you were going to write on.

RM: Oh yeah.

GM: Yes, all right. So it wasn't a real absence of contact.

RM: And what I wanted to do was write something that made Rousseau as a thinker understandable from *his* perspective. That is to say, put it this way: because I discovered something very interesting about what I did and what Strauss did and other areas of life which I would call artistic excellence in musical performance. Because I realized that just as when I was reading Rousseau, I tried to think: All right, I'm Rousseau, how does this fit in with something else I've written? The pianist, I think it was a pianist, anyway, I know it happened with this pianist. Tonight I'm going to a concert here of a pianist named Sally Pincus. She's on the music faculty here. She gives concerts all over the world. She is very unpretentious but very, very good, really good, and I once asked her about this after a concert. I said, "Is it true that when you're playing the music, when you're preforming, you're on the stage, you're not playing Chopin or Beethoven, his music is coming through you. You have his music completely occupying your whole mind." She said, "Yeah, that's the way it is. That's the way it is. You're expressing the music, you're not playing the music."

GM: Right.

RM: And that to me was very interesting, and I've, had conversations with a number of performers; and I only want to talk to a really good performer because a beginner is never going to have that, but the great performers all do. And what Strauss taught me, of course, is that's the only way you understand anybody who's really serious. And why is anybody really serious going to be that way? It's because what you need to create is different than what you create. You have some project or whatever, some would call it *telos*, and have a purpose to what you're doing. For instance, Strauss had the purpose obviously of making the text stand on its own feet because we couldn't possibly put ourselves into the historical condition, so treating it all as a march of history was his real enemy because it made, the thinker simply a log on the river flowing down in a predetermined way, and the point is that these thinkers in many major circumstances

actually directed where the river went. And certainly one of the biggest cases for me was not Rousseau—I mean, Rousseau, yes, in lots of ways. That is, what I wanted to end was the notion that all Rousseau was, was the *Social Contract*, or all that Rousseau was was the *Nouvelle Heloise*, or all that Rousseau was, was something in the intellectual movement of his time, but that he was somebody who had a lot to teach us right now.

But what I've been really impressed with most recently, and I've got two books on it, is Machiavelli.

RM: And Machiavelli is important, and actually I realized, to my astonishment, that I never really focused on this, but I never really focused on this because I didn't look at historical surroundings. And in Machiavelli's case, there's no question that in order to do what Strauss told me to do, I had to know about that.

RM: Why? What did Machiavelli do before he wrote anything? Do you know?

Well, he was the second secretary to the Signoria of the Florentine Republic.

RM: What does that mean? Florence was the richest city in Europe because of the Medici, and therefore it had immense relationships all over the place. People came there from anywhere and so forth, and he got a job working for the Signoria and very quickly, because he was so good, became in charge of both foreign relations and military policy for the city, because it was a small city. And so he had really a very responsible position and one of the things he did in that position, is he went for some particular reason to the court of Cesare Borgia, who was an important political figure for the foreign policy of Florence. When he got to that court, there was somebody else who was there, but not for the meeting. He was doing frescoes in Cesare's castle, and his name was Leonardo da Vinci. And they had these fascinating discussions, and one of the things that Leonardo thought of was making Florence a seaport. Why? Well, now I think of it totally different than I did in the two books when I wrote about this. The point is that Columbus didn't discover America. He certainly did not discover it. He thought he was in India on his first voyage in 1492.

In 1498, what happened was the King of Portugal hired Amerigo to take a trip. Why? Oh, because Amerigo Vespucci was a Florentine who was in Seville. What was he doing in Seville? He was the business agent of the Medici. And the Medici had banks all over the place, and he was not only in charge of that bank but he established a whole merchandising center for buying and reselling things, because Seville had become a very important city because of the union of Aragon and Castille. But Amerigo was in charge of that, and when Columbus went to have his ship, all of the outfitting of that ship was supervised by Amerigo Vespucci. Amerigo also learned how to take bearings for longitude and latitude. So Columbus asked him to come on the boat and just keep track of things and map. And so he went to the boat, and he came back from that and within a year or something like that, the Portuguese king decided that the Portuguese under Henry the Navigator had mapped the entire west coast of Africa, and Columbus thought he'd been to Asia. So the Portuguese wanted to get in on the Asian trade which was going to be much more lucrative than anything of Africa or going around the Cape of—it just didn't make any sense. So Amerigo took that boat for the King of Portugal. His first trip, I think it was 1498, he landed on the coast of Colombia.

This is a very early map of Eurasia.

GM: Oh, I see.

RM: They thought there was land there that was right there.

This is one of the early maps of what a sphere was, and the earth is a lot smaller, and you can see this is Spain, this is Saudi Arabia.

GM: Right. And India, the subcontinent, yeah.

RM: But in 1474 there was a mapmaker named Toscanelli, in Florence I think he was, and he made spheres. And so he made a sphere and then decided to make a map of the connection between the far western coast of the Eurasian land mass and the far eastern coast of the Eurasian land mass. This is just this thing put around a sphere and the way you look at that thing there. So the Atlantic Ocean is very small. And this is the map that Columbus had. That's why he thought he was in Asia.

RM: And this is the map that Amerigo had. Except that when Amerigo sailed—this is the first map that has a continent in here. But when Amerigo sailed, he hit the northern coast of South America on the coastline of what's now Colombia, and he went down that coastline until he got to the Amazon, and then went back to Portugal and then went back to Florence and did two things. He published a little pamphlet called "Mundus Novus," the New World. Because going down the coastline, he encountered, because he needed water for his ships, these little communities and they were primitive and they were very nice, they gave him water, they gave him food, and clearly these people had nothing to do with Asia. They had nothing to do with Europe. In fact, they had no idea there was anything there, and therefore they had no idea of Jesus or Christianity.

So when Mundus Novus is published, I think it's 1501, 1502, the thing that I took down and I've got copies of it behind me somewhere and I'm just not going to take time to look for it, it's called the Cantino Planisphere. It's the first picture, first map, 1502, of the coastline of South America; and what it does, it has the coastline of what Amerigo discovered on his first voyage on the map. And it's very clear what he did. And he went down that coastline and he came back and that map that's called the Cantino Planisphere is also 1502, and it was printed. So all over Europe there was a map and the little pamphlet, and he called it the New World, it was something between Asia and Europe. And that's why I have that, this is what, 1507, that's the Waldseemuller, that's the first world map like this. But anyway, the key thing that actually, if you look at the Waldseemuller, you'll see that the west coast of North America and South America is sort of a straight line because they came up the east coast in South America. Inland from the coast there's a row of mountains, and then incognita it just says because it's a straight line. There's something over there, we don't know what it is.

GM: Yes.

RM: It was very, very striking. But that whole discovery is explosive. And it's explosive because when Machiavelli learns of it, and we know Machiavelli had to know about it right away after this voyage where Amerigo called the Mundus Novus, he had to know it, and the reason he had to know about it is that he's still working in the Signoria. But he

has a couple people who are his private secretaries or assistants, and one of them is a man named Augustino Vespucci, Amerigo's nephew.

So people don't know. I discovered that and I said, "Oh, no wonder." Machiavelli's history is when the Medici overthrow the republic, they see him as a potential revolutionary. They tortured him for a year, put him under house arrest, and that's when he starts writing. And he writes, of course, *The Prince*, which has nothing to do on the surface with what he really thinks. We know that, but then why did he write that book that way as a pamphlet, easily understandable for Lorenzo di Medici, not the famous Lorenzo the Magnificent, but his grandnephew I think it is, who the family had assigned to run, I forget what the town was. It begins with O but it doesn't matter. He was given authority to control a town, its government, and Machiavelli realized that writing this book, with all this tough-minded stuff for this playboy kid who didn't know what the hell he was doing, was his get out of jail free card for the Medici family. I'll serve you perfectly well; I don't care about the republic. But if you don't know the circumstances of writing *The Prince*, that Machiavelli's under house arrest for suspicion of being a republican revolutionary, you don't understand the book at all. You know? And so I realized early that in the case of Machiavelli the history does tell you something about what he intended. And this doesn't mean that he's determined by history; it means that in fact he's changing history in some reason because of his context, and you can't understand that, I think, just as you couldn't understand Aristotle if you didn't what Plato wrote.

GM: Do you think Strauss assumed that students knew the history? I mean obviously, he himself knew it.

RM: Strauss assumed that if you took a course in political theory, and it was called political theory, not political philosophy, you didn't treat the books as truly philosophic books as he did. You treated them just as advice about politics and it fit the time and it fit what people said before. So the history starts with the Greeks, where this guy Socrates is going around, and Plato realizes that behind all these conventional views, there's something that's a core that's there. And when he speaks of forms, the first and obvious thing (which I never heard anybody say) is that one of the things they talk about in different places—when you go back and you try to really understand, you have to get down to the bottom of what's happening with Socrates. People talk about [how] they got penned dogs. And they talk about dogs all the time: "Well, I've got a German Shepherd, he's very interesting because he does this." "Oh no, it's funny because my dachshund doesn't do that at all." What is it that's the core they're talking about? Well, all the dogs have, basically they've got these four legs, they've got a tail. Humans don't have a tail. So if you talk about the form of something, it [is] just the evident thing that makes these people or these things different from something else. Because their form is not difficult. It's not a disembodied idea that has nothing to do with reality, disembodied idea. And we now know that it's pure information. Pure information in the genes. And it's got to be genes that are consistent and proves fertile offspring. That's as much of a form of forms as you could possibly have. That is, one of the things that astounded me about the teaching of the ancients when I thought seriously about it, which is in the last ten years, is how accurate it is scientifically now.

Strauss was right. All the historians missed it.

GM: What was Strauss right about?

RM: That philosophy is about seeking the truth about being, and being is not a historical product but what is behind the historical product and its manifestation under different circumstances in different times and places. And there may be a pattern to these changes in different times and places, but the fundamental thing is to find out what the being is as it appears from different perspectives, because you are in different perspectives. When you're looking at a mountain from different—I think East Rock Park, it was different if you were at the top or the bottom or here or there. It was also different if you were designing highways and you wanted a connector, or if you were a citizen and you wanted a place to walk. So clearly there's something very profound about political philosophy that you can find in medicine, you can find it anyplace else, but the one thing is that to reduce everything to a mere manifestation of political history or of history in some other sense is simply to miss what's going on, because there's always something that we learn from Socrates, from Aristotle, or from Machiavelli or St. Thomas Aquinas. There's always something to learn, and what's more, learning the difference between the esoteric and public meanings is the only way you can learn anything about the world.

GM: How much did Strauss directly address that theme of esoteric meanings?

RM: It was very clear that there was an esoteric meaning. He was very clear that when you were a philosopher, you had to write for other philosophers in a way that didn't cause you to be harmed, and that it was obvious before philosophers wrote anything from Socrates. And the question is: Why did Plato write down things about Socrates? Easily because Plato realized that this was something humans could do with their brains that they had to do, and the only way you could do that was to present a way of looking at being that people didn't think of, and having students who you talked to and who had their own responses, and you wanted them to understand what you were doing, but above all you wanted them to do what Socrates did, because you didn't know what you did that was wrong. I mean, and Strauss, well, Strauss said always assume there's a silent student in class who knows more than you do.

That's when I understood what Strauss was really teaching about. Because if you think of the esoteric meaning, you think of that as part of a dialogue with these people who are going to say "Ah, but you were wrong." And I have come to think of Socrates in a very different way which Strauss never talked about. He didn't talk about the natural sciences, for a very good reason; he didn't know about them and he was not going to talk about things he didn't know. But clearly, so many political philosophers have dealt with that, the question of what nature is, is something that was crucial.

GM: Certainly.

RM: And all I realized is that in order to teach about Rousseau, you couldn't think about teaching about Rousseau and ignore what was being done by the anthropologist looking at monkeys and apes without misleading contemporary students. And none of the people who were studying Rousseau were talking about that, but I thought that was what you had to do.

That's why I started working with these other people, because there was a lot of people, a dozen at least, who started this and it took off, you know, like a rocket. But all of that for me has been Strauss, who got me started. I mean, such a difference from what I had in my head when I think of some of the first people who studied science, for instance. They just were not interesting. Then, from the point of view of what I ultimately wanted to do my work on, they were interesting for the things they had to say but not from what I wanted my life to be. I didn't want to be a chemist and work in a smelly lab. I wanted to work on words; that's what I liked. But I wanted to see the truth in words and what it can teach us of what we don't know. And my more recent understanding is that Socrates is far more responsible for modern science, and not just modern political philosophy, than we realize. Why? You can't do science unless you being by saying: What don't I know? And because very few political philosophers have studied science to the point where they're respected as a scientist as I am now, then I realized yeah, you have to say we don't know this.

And it's exciting to see that political philosophy is scientific and that that's very important, just as, for example, I came across a copy of something I haven't published. It's an essay on the scientific reason, I think for socialized medicine. But, that is, the whole notion that the Constitution of the United States says that Congress shall pass laws for the common defense and general welfare. Well, dealing with this whole idea that a biologist, nothing to do with politics, is kind of foolish because one of the things of general welfare is contagious disease. And one of the things that moderns really realized about contagious disease was the great flu epidemic after World War I.

And we know there are still—you know, Zika, but once you understand that contagious diseases require political response, you see that the political scientists who don't want to study biology don't understand anything. They're mistaken in a profound way about how you can run government because among other things, in an educational system you have to have an educational system that has some way of dealing with both geniuses and retarded kids, and not everybody being the same . . . is to say that I discovered something recently, very interesting, you know, namely, people are different.

GM: Could I ask you a question?

RM: You should start asking questions all the time.

GM: Right, okay. A little while ago you mentioned that the first book you published was as a Straussian, and I just wondered what you meant by a "Straussian"?

RM: I think of myself as a Straussian and as somebody who does biology and politics, and I don't think of those things as at all antithetical, because I wouldn't do the second without having done the first.

GM: But what is it to be a Straussian then, for you?

RM: Oh, it's quite simple. First of all, you have to agree that there's always that silent student in class. You can't do science without that. It's absolutely true for the natural sciences, but non-scientists don't realize it, and you have to do it for political philosophy. That means you're always open to the fact you make mistakes.

GM: Right.

RM: That's the first thing, but it's the most important thing. Secondly, you cannot ignore human nature. There's no way of understanding human behavior without understanding why we're different from either monkeys or rats or you have to know what it is to be human. However, now if you only use the historical view of human nature, you're a historicist, which is not what Strauss wanted you to do.

GM: When you say to use the historical view, you mean reading Aristotle and Locke and Hobbes and authors like that?

RM: The view of human nature has to be viewed as being considered seriously as what it was, and then you have to be aware that it is important to try to find out why it's different from our current biological view of human nature, otherwise your student's going to be confused. So you have to know in particular, what does Aristotle say about human nature that is essentially true and in fact may be missed by people who do biology? And the answer is *telos*, because there is an end in the Aristotelian sense to human behavior. Now if you say Darwin is opposed to ancient, to Aristotle or Socrates, survival of the fittest is a *telos*. It's not the only *telos*, however, because men can get together in warfare and have the enthusiasm of dying for the group. So that clearly indicates that there's something more complicated, and we have to keep on working on what that *telos* is. And a *telos* clearly has to do with something that is purely, if I can say spiritual, I could say the point is it's not material. That is, it's not material because there's always some purpose beyond the self that the self is seeking. Now it's true that the self has its own instincts, its own impulses, but following my own impulses is itself an end, and the question is, if you are only following your own purposes without linking them to anything else, then you are essentially an animal. But humans, if you look around at humans, they don't do that. Well, you know some people who do that, they're people who are not really able to change the world. They're not even able to get elected dog catcher.

GM: So in a way for you, then, studying contemporary biology is very important, but also to read the historical writings of people like Aristotle and Hobbes and so on. Contemporary science hasn't taken the place of that because they articulate an understanding that is much richer, larger than a merely scientific understanding?

RM: In particular, for example, Machiavelli. It turns out that I think, as I suggested but never really understood before, that the impact of Amerigo Vespucci's discovery of a new world with these people who didn't know anything about Europe is crucial for Machiavelli, because it means that you have to rethink everything in the past.

GM: Why?

RM: Well, why weren't those people like us? And why are they like us? And what's different? And why are they in some ways nicer than us, as Rousseau said? When did Rousseau write? Oh, well, first of all he walked across the countryside, so he saw that these people in the countryside were in many ways nicer than the people in Paris. And then oh, well, there were these people traveling around the world when he wrote, right? After all, what was happening in America? You know? You just open your mind to things you didn't say, and I think that political philosophy is much more fun when you do

this, but only if you really understand the book as it stands on its own feet, as Strauss taught me to do. That is, if I'm going to be the individual, the student at the foot of Rousseau who understands more than Rousseau, as I may or may not, but if I take science seriously, Rousseau would love to have a conversation with me about human nature. He would love it.

So I think that the idea that you have to view these things as somehow inconsistent with each other is true only if you're talking about the ordinary or non-philosophic level of life or nonesoteric level. That is, what I discovered is that there's always something in a good scientist that he has to teach me, and that it turns out he's fascinated when he discovered what I've had to say. I mean, I've had very good conversations with Wilson. He didn't have difficulty understanding how his thinking was incredibly useful to somebody who studied political philosophy. He hadn't really focused on that but he thought that was very interesting. So I found it very easy to talk to him and he found it easy to talk to me. But I think that that happens periodically, and yet it also happens a lot that you talk to people and you realize: Well, I'm not going to talk him about what I do. Or what I do now is I say, Well, you know what I study now is toxic chemicals and behavior, which is very important. I mean, there the point is fascinating. I got into this entirely because of other people. It started when I went to a conference in California, and I was around a table with this guy named Ed (oh, I usually come up with it right away, it doesn't matter) who said that he was interested in violence but he discovered that two of these violent criminals that he was working with had high levels of lead in their blood.

GM: How did it come to be found out that they did have high levels of lead?

RM: I don't think he explained that. Somebody tested their blood for some other reason and found that they had high lead levels in their blood, but I don't know why they tested their blood.

GM: OK.

RM: But the point is, I'm on the way back from that meeting, and I say, "Wait a second." I mean, I know the guy's first name is Ed, but you know how it is when you don't have a name, you just forget it, it'll come to me later. If that's right, then where there's lead pollution there should be more crime. I thought about that some more. I thought about that some more when I was at school, and another problem to work on, and I'm going to work on that. I got a bunch of students, I had three very bright students and I got them to put together a spreadsheet. Why? I'd been assigned a course at Yale which was one of these scope and method things. No, was that at Yale or was that at Dartmouth? I think I might have already been at Dartmouth, I can't remember which, it doesn't matter. I asked these kids to create a spreadsheet for every county in the United States, all the socioeconomic data, population, blacks, income, and stuff, and to get me then the lead level that was the EPA saying there was lead pollution. Yes or no? And I had to learn how to do the mathematics, but I'd been in this course with Dennis Sullivan. It was here at Dartmouth. He was the guy that did mathematics; you know, statistical studies and things. And so the idea was to have one course was with the philosopher and the most scientific people, guy on the faculty. There wasn't anybody else, he's since passed away. We did a lot of things together, but we published some stuff together. I just learned that there was this mathematical stuff you could do, and suddenly I was doing work on toxins

and behavior. And I did it because I followed what was new and what looked like it had something important to do with society. That is, if you could find out that there was something in the environment that really was causing violent crime that people didn't know about, and you could get rid of it or do something about it, that is as untouched now as it was then. And actually what happened when I—[15]

GM: Here you go. You were talking about Rousseau.

RM: Well actually, what I'm talking about now is my own career. When I think about Rousseau walking toward Chambéry and what he would have thought he was doing, I think about this case. My father had a small business. It started in 1920 when he got out of Harvard and he couldn't get a job teaching, which is what he wanted to do. So he went to work for somebody and then he realized there was a business that really was needed. Movie theaters had just started. Traditional theaters, when there was going to be a new play, you know, Romeo and Juliette coming in two weeks, the owner of the theater would go out on the stage with a placard and say, "Coming in two weeks," you know. Well, when they started movies, the first thing was well, how are we going to tell people what the next movie is? The room is dark. Oh, the best thing to do is take a little—we have titles in front of the movie, take a title of this coming next week and put it on some film and attach it to the film we're playing. Well, it was called a trailer, although sometimes it was shown at the beginning or between the news and the play on the movie or whatever, and my father decided he would make those things. For that, he had to have a way of printing, just a letterpress to print the titles. He had to have a way of setting up a camera to take the title, and above all he had to have a place to develop and make copies of the film, because Kodak sold movie film, he could get 35 mm film, but he had to develop and print. Well, this is in Boston, and once he got started he had the only place where you could develop and print movie film, for the moment at least, in New England.

But also he realized that all through New England there were theaters. When I was growing up, whenever we went out, we liked to ski in the winter, take the whole family skiing, we would stop in towns and he would go in and see the owner or the manager of the theater. And I remember that we used to go to a place just outside of Laconia called Belknap, and he often stopped in Laconia to talk to a theater owner, and we always stayed overnight at a place called the Barracks, which is right near the ski area. It was run by somebody named Connie and Bill Austin and I used to go there long after he passed away. And when I was going there when I was in college, I discovered that—I always washed or dried the dishes with my mother after meals, after dinner, so I discovered they needed somebody to help out in the kitchen because they had these double decker bunks, they had lots of people, it was a cheap place to go, and usually got a ride up with a guy who was in the navy at Newport and he would come through Boston and take me up and back so I didn't have to drive because I didn't own a car. And I would wash dishes for room and board. And so after the noon meal, everybody's off skiing and I'd wash and dry the dishes and then Connie or Bill would take me out and somebody else would bring me home.

[15] The tape disk was changed at this point.

But I mean I did lots of things like that, which were, you know, which were fun. But the core of things was set by this decision that my father expected and everybody expected that I would take over his business. I had an older brother who was an engineer, and he could fix anything but he was not going to run a business. That was not the kind of thing he wanted to do. But I could do that, I worked with my father a lot and I was just going to take over the business. One day I was walking home from school, I think I was still in junior high school, because from where I think I was between Newton High School and my home, and I said to myself, you know, "I want to be a teacher. I like my father's business, but I want to be a teacher." I walked home, and I started to think about that. The more I thought about it, the more I thought yeah, I want to be a teacher.

GM: And you didn't know what you wanted to teach, but you knew you wanted to teach.

RM: I wanted to teach something. Now my father made some films that were educational films, and some of these films like, I remember making one of the Brown Shoe Company in Gardiner, Maine, about how they made shoes, which they took to those exhibits where somebody from Jordan Marsh would go to see what shoes they wanted to buy. And here they had this film about how they made shoes. But I remember lugging lights around for that and doing stuff to help out with making it and so forth. But I realized that while I had expected to go to my father's business and I could do it, what I really wanted to do was to teach. And I think that was before I had this experience with Nick Babble where I taught him, how to do algebra. But I'd certainly been doing things, like explaining things to other people and finding that I loved to do that. It worked, and I found I could do that and so forth.

GM: That's interesting, because often people are inspired by a teacher, but you were again inspired by the experience, by the activity.

RM: Well, the activity was in a way inspired by my father's work with these educational films. And I worked on those things, so that's one place it came. And another place it came from really liking some teachers and being struck by how much they could teach. I remember a Spanish teacher really affected me. Going back, I remember some teachers. A kindergarten teacher, Miss Cain I remember had a big influence, I really was excited by learning things in particular courses. Miss Collins was in third grade, another one. But anyway, it doesn't make any difference. The big thing is that when I decided I wanted to be a teacher, I said to myself: "Oh, I got to tell my father." And I said, "He's not going to like it." Well, you cannot *not* tell your father, because if you don't want to go into his business and take it over, he's going to need to know that in terms of his planning, and you're going to need to make arrangements, which is probably going to cost money, to go to graduate school. So you got to talk to him. So I got my courage up one day and I said I wanted to talk to him, not at meal but just personally. And I was terrified. I said: "I'm afraid you're not going to like this, but I've given it a lot of thought and I think I want to be a teacher. I mean, I like the business but I think what I really would do best is to be a teacher." He was thrilled. He was thrilled because when he graduated from Harvard he wanted to be a teacher. And the best part of what he was doing was a teaching thing, and he was thrilled that I would think of that.

GM: Well, that's great.

RM: But that is this, I mean, one of my sons is a professor at Tufts.

GM: What does he teach?

RM: He teaches something very interesting. He teaches food and its necessity. He got started in food in Africa because he discovered that the whole food production activity, field, whatever, that's just a bad pun to call it a field, was tremendously influenced by the design of seeds and is suited to environments. But the seed companies had gone from traditional just replicating seeds to find out what do the seeds need to grow in the Midwest or the Southwest or whatever? And Will—my younger son is William—Will realized that one of the crucial problems in Africa is that the American or European seed companies didn't do that. There wasn't a market. The market wasn't big enough. And he began to work on getting those things done in universities. And guess what? What is similar in what he was doing and what I've done? The notion that there's an ethical dimension to science. I mean, I'm really proud of that, because my oldest son was much more interested in, he was interested in math and he was much more a—not someone who was really focused on the human dimension but in terms of really being responsible and doing a careful job, and he ended up at a firm that used to be called Alliance Bernstein and now it's called Bernstein. It was one of the companies that did a great deal of work with equity funds. So at one point he explained to me that the equity fund that he was totally in charge of had assets that were over a billion dollars. Well, what does that require? [Laughs] I mean, I realized how proud I was of my kids, because they both got the core thing that really was an issue going back to Strauss. And it had nothing to do with thinking that they're Straussians, because they're not Straussians. But understanding that you have to combine knowledge and the ethical implications of knowledge and the needs of the world is something that is so foreign to almost everything, and it's the center of Strauss's work.

GM: Yeah. That might be a good place to pause now. That's great. Do you mind if I take your photograph?