



## JEFFERSON LECTURE

On May 8, 2007, Harvey Mansfield delivered the 36th Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities at the Warner Theatre in Washington, DC. His talk was on “How to Understand Politics: What the Humanities Can Say to Science.” The Jefferson Lecture was established in 1972 as the highest honor the federal government bestows for distinguished intellectual and public achievement in the humanities.

For more than forty years, Harvey Mansfield has been writing and teaching about political philosophy. His commentary “demonstrates the virtues that should guide scholars of the humanities,” writes Mark Blitz, a former student. Blitz explains those virtues as “patient exploration of the intention of a superior author, attention to other scholars and generosity to trailblazing teachers, brilliance and wit, and an eye toward what can improve us here and now.”

Mansfield examines both contemporary politics and their historical origins. His fourteen books delve into the words of past thinkers such as Edmund Burke and Machiavelli, where he finds answers to puzzles such as why we believe today that political parties are respectable or desirable? The “Settlement of 1688,” Mansfield writes, “. . . resolved the religious issue by demoting it. . . . Party government required such a separation, because it was the operation of the religious issue in politics which caused great parties.”

Mansfield credits Machiavelli as the mastermind behind modernity. “I think he was responsible for the original insight behind the American presidency,” says Mansfield. “Our country is the first republic that had strong executive power, as previously it was thought that executive power was contrary to republican principles. But we managed to combine this princely power with the people’s authority.”

Mansfield grew up immersed in the field of politics—in New Haven, where his father was a professor of political science, and also in Washington, D.C., where his father worked for the Office of Price Administration during World War II. Mansfield remembers D.C. as an exciting place to be: “I saw many famous events, like Franklin Roosevelt’s funeral and the two parades, for victory in Europe and victory in Japan.” Years later, when he was an undergraduate at Harvard, a teaching assistant noted, “It’s in the cards for you to become a political scientist.” Mansfield recalls, “I don’t remember ever seriously considering any alternative.” He went on to earn his PhD from Harvard in 1961, and began teaching there the next year.

Mansfield’s first book, *Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke*, came out in 1965. Since then he has published thirteen more books including three translations of Machiavelli and a translation of Alex de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, which he co-translated with his late wife Delba Winthrop. Articles and political analysis by Mansfield frequently appear in periodicals such as the *Weekly Standard*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New Republic*, the *National Review*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Mansfield’s most recent book, *Manliness*, looks at the effects of the sexual revolution on traditional masculine virtues. He defines “manliness” as “confidence and command in a situation of risk,” and offers examples of leaders who display this quality—from Achilles to Margaret Thatcher. “My book is a defense, but a qualified defense of manliness,” says Mansfield. “The good side is when the risk is of evil and the confidence is justified.”

Mansfield’s numerous awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship and a National Humanities Medal. He has served as a member of the Council of the American Political Science Association and the National Council on the Humanities, as a fellow of the National Humanities Center, and as president of the New England Historical Association. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.