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Fear is the foundation of most governments.

— *John Adams*

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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The U.S. Embrace of Monetary Tyranny, Part I

by Jacob G. Hornberger



The rise of Bitcoin as an alternative currency raises some important questions about America's monetary system. Why does the United States have a fiat-money system — that is, a system of irredeemable paper currency? Why aren't Americans free to use any money they want? What is the role of legal-tender laws in America's monetary system? What role does the Federal Reserve play? Why is there FDIC insurance?

Most important, is America's modern-day monetary system consistent with the principles of a free society?

To find the answer to those questions, let's begin with an examination of the U.S. Constitution, the

document that brought the federal government into existence.

By the time the Framers met at the Constitutional Convention to propose changes to the country's governmental system, the country had been operating under the Articles of Confederation for several years. After the break from England, the states had come together under a confederation, one that provided for a national government with very limited, weak powers. In fact, the national government under the Articles didn't even have the power to tax.

The primary reason for that type of governmental structure was that the American people ardently opposed the concept of a strong, centralized national government. As Englishmen, they had experienced firsthand what it was like to live under a powerful central government and, even worse, one that was an empire, and they had not liked it. That was why they had been willing to take up arms against their own government and secede from the British Empire.

When the delegates to the Constitutional Convention met, it was with the object of proposing changes to the Articles of Confederation. To the surprise of nearly everyone, they did not come up with a plan to

modify the Articles. Instead, they came up with an entirely new governmental system, one that provided for a federal government that had significantly more power than the national government under the Articles of Confederation.

Americans were not happy. Despite the many problems that had arisen under the Articles, the last thing people wanted was another strong, centralized national government similar to the one against which they had recently rebelled.

Enumerated powers

The Framers had an answer to their concerns. They pointed out that the new government would be called into existence by the Constitution, whose very terms would outline its powers. That is, unlike other governments throughout history, it would not be a government of unlimited power to do whatever it deemed in the best interests of the citizenry. Instead, its powers would be limited to those few enumerated in the Constitution itself, along with those that would be “necessary and proper” for carrying out the enumerated powers.

Thus, to determine whether the federal government could legally wield a certain power, it would be unnecessary to search for an ex-

press restriction on such power in the Constitution. Instead, one would simply examine the list of powers enumerated in the Constitution. If the power wasn’t among those enumerated or “necessary and proper” to carrying out an enumerated power, it simply could not be legally exercised.

**The new government’s
powers would be limited to
those few enumerated
in the Constitution.**

Under the Constitution, it was different with respect to the states. They would retain full sovereignty over the citizens under their jurisdiction except where the Constitution expressly restricted the exercise of a particular power.

Thus to determine whether a state could legally wield a certain power, one would search the Constitution to determine whether the state was expressly prohibited from exercising it. If there was no restriction, the state could legally exercise it. If there was a restriction, the state could not exercise it.

Of course, the powers of the state governments were restricted by their own state constitutions, which spelled out what those governments might and might not do.

Why didn't the Framers simply propose a federal government with the omnipotent power to do whatever it deemed to be in the best interests of the citizenry? Because they didn't want that type of government, and they knew that the American people would never have accepted that type of government.

The structure of the governmental system that the Constitution brought into existence is a testament to the distrust that our American ancestors had in a strong central government. Not only were powers limited to those enumerated in the document, the government was also divided into three separate branches in the hope that such division would keep the federal government weak.

Moreover, soon after the Constitution was accepted, ten amendments were added, emphasizing the concerns that Americans had over the bad things that their new government could do to people — the types of things that tyrannical regimes had done to people throughout history, including the British regime against which they had recently rebelled.

Debased money

Among the worst and most tyrannical acts that they were con-

cerned with was governmental debasement of the currency. Throughout history, governments had plundered and looted the citizenry through monetary debasement. Prior to the invention of the printing press, gold coins and silver coins had circulated as money. That didn't stop kings from debasing the currency.

As bad as clipping the coin was, however, it paled in significance in comparison with inflation associated with paper currency.

For example, when coins came into the realm, say, for the payment of taxes, government officials would often shave the edges around the coins, leaving, say, a one-ounce coin weighing less than one ounce. They would then take the shavings, melt them down, and create a new coin that they could spend on their ever-growing number of governmental projects or imperial military adventures. That process of monetary debasement was known as “clipping the coin.”

As bad as clipping the coin was, however, it paled in significance in comparison with inflation associated with paper currency. With the invention of the printing press, there was virtually no limit to how much money the king could print

and spend in the marketplace to fund his projects and programs. The influx of newly printed money would result in a decrease in the value of everyone else's money.

The beauty of that type of monetary debasement, from the standpoint of the government, was that the citizenry often couldn't figure out that it was the king's inflation of the money supply that was the cause of rapidly escalating prices within society. Thus the citizenry would often embrace the king's condemnation of rapacious businessmen in the private sector and his imposition of harshly enforced price controls against them.

When the delegates met at the Constitutional Convention, Americans had just recently experienced the hyperinflation of the Continental currency, the paper currency that Congress had overissued during the Revolution. The popular phrase at the time "Not worth a Continental" reflected the results of that period of severe monetary debasement.

Thus, the last thing that the Framers wanted to bring into existence was a federal government with the power to debase the currency, not only because they understood the evil in such a system, but also because they knew that the re-

spective states would never approve the Constitution if the government had such a power.

On the contrary, what the Framers instead wanted was to bring into existence a monetary system based on sound money — a system by which the federal government would be precluded from plundering and looting people through inflation.

To determine the nature and extent of the federal government's monetary powers, we must examine the list of enumerated powers within the Constitution. Keep in mind, once again, that if a certain power isn't enumerated in the Constitution (or necessary and proper to carrying out an enumerated power), that means that the federal government is precluded from exercising it.

The last thing that the Framers wanted to bring into existence was a federal government with the power to debase the currency.

Keep in mind also that it's different with the states. They have the sovereign power to do whatever they want unless there is a specific restriction in the Constitution.

Three important questions naturally arise, especially in the con-

text of the type of monetary system we have today: Does the Constitution delegate to the federal government the power to issue paper money, either redeemable in gold or silver or something else, or redeemable in nothing but other paper money (i.e., fiat money)? Is the power to make paper money legal tender among the federal government's enumerated powers? Is the establishment of a central bank, e.g., a Federal Reserve, among the federal government's enumerated powers? How about the establishment of a federal insurance program to insure people's deposits in banks?

The answer to all of those questions is: No. None of those powers is among the enumerated powers of the federal government in the Constitution.

Instead, the only monetary power that the Constitution expressly delegates to the federal government is the power "to coin money, regulate the value thereof, and of foreign coin."

We do find references to monetary issues within the Constitution that are directed to the states. The states are expressly prohibited from emitting "bills of credit," which was the term used at that time for paper money. They are also expressly prohibited from making anything but

"gold and silver coin a tender in payment of debts." The states are also expressly prohibited from enacting any law "impairing the obligation of contracts."

The test for determining whether a federal power is permitted is whether such power is among those that are expressly enumerated.

Does the fact that the Constitution places no such express restrictions on the federal government mean that it may wield the power to do those things that the state governments are expressly prohibited from doing? No! Again, remember that the test for determining whether a federal power is permitted is whether such power is among those that are expressly enumerated. If it's not enumerated, the federal government may not exercise it.

Constitutional money

Since the enumerated powers expressly delegated to the federal government do not include the power to issue paper money (i.e., "emit bills of credit") or to make paper money legal tender, the federal government is precluded from doing such things even though the document does not expressly pro-

hibit the federal government from doing them. The only monetary power that the federal government was given was the power to coin money and regulate the value thereof and of foreign coin.

Thus, the U.S. Constitution brought into existence the most revolutionary monetary system in history, one that was based on gold coins and silver coins serving as the official money of the United States. It was a system in which people could rely on sound money for their economic transactions indefinitely into the future, a monetary system by which people could be assured that the government lacked the power to plunder and loot them through inflation.

The enumerated power to “coin money,” combined with the failure to grant the federal government the power to issue paper money, combined with the restriction on the states from issuing paper money, combined with the prohibition on the states from making anything but gold and silver coins legal tender could mean only one thing: The Framers intended the U.S. monetary system to be based on a gold-coin, silver-coin standard.

That intention was demonstrated soon after the federal government came into existence. In the

Coinage Act of 1792, Congress established the U.S. Mint, which was charged with the responsibility of issuing official U.S. gold coins and silver coins as the new official money of the United States.

The basic unit of currency would be called “the dollar.” It would consist of a silver coin, commonly known as a “silver dollar,” which would contain a specified weight and fineness of silver. There were also half-dollars, quarter-dollars, dimes, and half-dimes, all of which were made of silver.

The Framers intended the U.S. monetary system to be based on a gold-coin, silver-coin standard.

Ten silver dollars would be equal to a \$10 gold coin, called an Eagle, which would contain a certain defined weight and fineness of gold. Another gold coin, a Half Eagle, would be smaller and be equal in value to five silver dollars. Quarter-eagles would be equal to two and a half dollars.

This system became known as the “gold standard.” Notice something important about it. It wasn’t a paper-money system “backed by gold,” as so many commentators today suggest. That’s because there wasn’t any federal paper money at

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all, including paper money backed by gold. Remember: the Constitution didn't empower the federal government to issue paper money.

Instead, the gold standard was a monetary system in which gold coins and silver coins were the official money of the United States. That's the system that the Constitution brought into existence. That was the system that was used in the United States for more 100 years. That's the system that prevented the U.S. government from plundering and looting the American people through monetary debasement. Combined with such things as open immigration, no income taxation, minimal regulation, and no welfare, it was a monetary system that contributed to the tremendous outburst of economic growth and prosperity that characterized 19th-century America.

That is obviously not the type of monetary system we have today, which is one based on fiat money — that is, paper money denominated by notes that promise to pay nothing and that are irredeemable in nothing but other paper notes — a system by which the U.S. govern-

ment has been able to plunder and loot the American people through monetary debasement for more than 100 years. It's not a coincidence that what is denominated as a "dollar" today has approximately 5 percent of the value the dollar had back in 1913, when the Federal Reserve was established.

How did that happen? How did that radical change in the monetary system occur, without even the semblance of a constitutional amendment? The story begins with the Civil War and culminates in the economic chaos of the Great Depression.

Jacob Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation.

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"The U.S. Embrace of
Monetary Tyranny, Part 2"
by Jacob G. Hornberger
"Fighting Discrimination
Without the Government"
by Sheldon Richman

Libertarianism: The Moral and the Practical

by Sheldon Richman



If I say that a government activity — “public” schooling, perhaps, or the war on selected drug merchants and users — helps turn the inner cities into hellholes and otherwise makes people’s lives miserable, is that a moral objection or a practical (utilitarian or generally consequentialist) objection?

Some libertarians are inclined to say it’s a utilitarian objection, but I’ve long been uncomfortable with that answer. For one thing, valid or not, in philosophy, utilitarianism is recognized as a moral theory, so utilitarian objections cannot be excluded from the realm of moral propositions. Pointing out that a policy destroys the inner cities certainly sounds like a moral objection.

Leaving that aside, we must inquire whether libertarian concerns are really divisible into, on the one hand, a concern with duties (deontology), for example, respecting individual rights, and on the other, a concern with practical consequences. This is an unfortunate feature of many libertarians’ thinking, but it’s not confined to libertarians. In this bifurcated view of the human world, there is a list of moral “dos” and “don’ts” that are not directly related to so-called practical matters, specifically, the conditions under which human beings can prosper on this earth. That strikes me as odd, if for no other reason than that in this view, the “moral” side appears to outrank the “practical” side: success is nice, but the ethical test has priority. You hear libertarians say they would favor freedom even if it did not promote good outcomes such as prosperity because people have a right to freedom that is separate from its consequences. (Of course, they don’t actually believe that freedom *could* have bad consequences. But is that just a lucky coincidence? More on that below.)

I’m hardly alone in my uneasiness with this separation of concerns into the moral and the practical. In my camp is no less a personage than Adam Smith. Look

at this passage from *The Wealth of Nations*:

[The] happiness and perfection of a man, considered not only as an individual, but as the member of a family, of a state, and of the great society of mankind, was the object which the ancient moral philosophy proposed to investigate. In that philosophy the duties of human life were treated of as subservient to the happiness and perfection of human life. But when moral, as well as natural philosophy, came to be taught only as subservient to theology, the duties of human life were treated of as chiefly subservient to the happiness of a life to come. In the ancient philosophy the perfection of virtue was represented as necessarily productive, to the person who possessed it, of the most perfect happiness in this life. In the modern philosophy it was frequently represented as generally, or rather as almost always, inconsistent with any degree of happiness in this life; and heaven was to be earned only by penance and mortification, by the austerities and

abasement of a monk; not by the liberal, generous, and spirited conduct of a man. Casuistry, and an ascetic morality, made up, in most cases, the greater part of the moral philosophy of the schools. By far the most important of all the different branches of philosophy became in this manner by far the most corrupted.

In commenting on this passage, Tibor Machan and David Brown wrote, in “The Self-Imposed Poverty of Economics,”

Smith saw that when morality, or ethics, is conceived along lines that would be fully realized in the work of Immanuel Kant — who denied that anything done to advance one’s own cause can have moral significance — moral thinking cannot embrace the virtue of prudence, or practical wisdom. (Nor can *any* moral virtue be construed or justified, however broadly, in relation to the acting agent’s own well-being and flourishing.) But prudence — recognized as a prominent virtue indeed in the ethics of Socrates and Aristotle — would make plenty

of room for an ethical conception of most economic activity.... With prudence expelled from the moral realm, however, all the economists can do to render commerce and business respectable is to collapse them, along with the rest of life, into expressions of near-bodily functions à la Hobbes....

As we see, the division of human life into the moral and the practical is of recent vintage. Smith's reference to "ancient philosophy" is a reference to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (and perhaps the Thomists whom they inspired), for whom this chasm would be unfathomable. Moral inquiry for them was essentially an investigation into the art of living as a reasoning, language-using *social* being. The concern of ethics, according to Aristotle, is to learn how such a being must think and act in order to flourish individually and as a member of society; the object of consideration is "the practical life of man as possessing reason." That's why prudence (or practical wisdom) finds a place on his list of virtues. In *Rational Man: A Modern Interpretation of Aristotelian Ethics*, Henry B. Veatch elaborates why ethics may be regarded as the art of living, al-

though, to be sure, it is an art unlike all other arts.

Utilitarian flaws

So I, for one, don't accept the division of the case for freedom into the moral and the practical. It's a mistake, as well as harmful to the cause. But does that mean I am a consequentialist, or utilitarian? Heavens no! The consequentialist case for freedom is too insecure. How would you feel if someone said, "I will respect your rights to life, liberty, and property as long as I calculate that doing so will produce the greatest good"? The classic monkey wrench in the utilitarian machine is the question whether one person may morally be killed so that his harvested organs may save the lives of five others. The utilitarian might respond, "Perhaps, unless the fear that this potential engenders would subtract too much from the total happiness."

I don't accept the division of the case for freedom into the moral and the practical.

You see the problem. Practically speaking, how would a utilitarian go about netting out the good and bad consequences when interpersonal comparisons of subjective

utility are by their nature ruled out? Moreover, as Gary Chartier emphasizes in his book *Anarchy and Legal Order*, the components of well-being are disparate and incommensurable — that is, not reducible to an underlying homogeneous element.

One response is along these lines: Yes, *act*, or *direct, utilitarianism*, in which each action is to be evaluated according to whether it will produce the greatest good/happiness/pleasure, is indeed problematic. Therefore let us substitute for it *rule*, or *indirect, utilitarianism*, along the lines of Henry Hazlitt's *Foundations of Morality*, according to which it is rules, not acts, that are to be judged according to their tendency to create the greatest good, namely, by maximizing social cooperation.

The two sides of the artificial moral-practical divide need each other if the strongest case for freedom is to be proffered.

That seems like a promising approach, but as Roderick Long points out, there's a problem: "It has often been claimed that indirect utilitarianism is unstable, and must collapse either into direct utilitarianism on the one hand or into 'rules fetishism' on the other." In other words, a har-

dy rule utilitarian will follow a rule even when it is expected *not* to maximize good consequences — if he did otherwise, he'd be an act utilitarian. But then *following the rule*, not maximizing the good, has become the overriding objective (regardless of why the rule was adopted initially) — and that is no longer utilitarianism. It is deontology. (The philosopher David Lyons prominently advanced this "collapse" argument, and the utilitarian J.J.C. Smart conceded the point.)

Thus, utilitarianism is fatally flawed. Rejecting it, however, does not obligate one to embrace deontology, or "rules fetishism." In the Aristotelian (eudaemonist or virtue-ethics) approach, a concern with consequences is obviously justified — remember, we're interested in "the practical life of man as possessing reason" — but that concern figures in the very formulation of the virtues, just as considerations of virtue, such as justice (including respect for rights), figure in our formulation of what constitutes good consequences. Long writes,

On this view, human welfare (whether individual or general) and justice are conceptually interrelated, with neither concept being basic but each

depending in part on the other (and all the other virtues) for its content, just as Aristotle defines virtue and human flourishing in terms of one another. [For details, see Long's important article "Why Does Justice Have Good Consequences?" bit.ly/OWyfXI]

Finally, both sides of the artificial moral-practical divide need each other if the strongest case for freedom is to be proffered. Long writes,

Most people are unlikely to find the deontological case for a given course of action compelling so long as they believe it would have terrible consequences; likewise, they are equally unlikely to find the consequentialist case compelling so long as they believe that the action violates human dignity, or equality, or liberty.

But there's more to this than strategic considerations, Long adds, because in real life,

one rarely finds members of either camp relying solely on a single set of considerations. It is a rare moral or political polemic

indeed that does not include both consequentialist and deontological arguments....

Whatever they may say officially, most consequentialists would be deeply disturbed to discover that their favoured policies slighted human dignity, and most deontologists would be deeply disturbed to discover that their favoured policies had disastrous consequences.

This "suggests that most professed deontologists and consequentialists are actually, to their credit, crypto-eudaemonists," Long writes elsewhere.

This is a big subject about which much has been written. Thus, lots more could be said. I hope I've said enough for now to justify seeing the moral and practical cases for freedom as one and the same.

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FDR Farm-Folly Lessons For Obamacare

by James Bovard



As the Obama administration wreaks further havoc on health care, many people expect the politicians to recognize their follies and relent. However, history indicates that rulers will continue seizing new power regardless of how much wreckage results. The farm policy of Franklin Roosevelt exemplifies how politicians “double down” on their most brazen follies.

Roosevelt’s Brain Trust agricultural planners had unlimited faith in their capacity as benevolent despots. His Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) was launched in 1933 at the same time as the National Industrial Recovery Act, which restricted working hours, restrained industrial output, and allowed businesses to

form committees to dictate restraints on competition. (One industrial code limited the number of strip-teases that could be performed in a burlesque show.) Both acts assumed that prosperity could be secured by restricting production and boosting prices — prosperity through “universal monopoly and universal scarcity.” That panacea was soon abandoned for business, but it was to carry on for more than half a century for agriculture.

Many farmers were fiercely opposed to a federal takeover. Their attitude toward government assistance depended largely on whether they were successfully standing on their own two feet. The *New York Times* reported in May 1933 that “it is the unmortgaged farmer who shies away from an elaborate machinery of federal supervision; the mortgaged farmer does not care how many federal agents camp in his barnyard to count his planted acres and his pigs.” Unmortgaged farmers polled heavily against all phases of federal control in a 1933 Midwest survey. After one year’s experience with the AAA, Kansas farmers — the nation’s most efficient wheat producers — again polled heavily against continued federal controls.

The AAA set American crop prices far above world market prices

es. As a result, agricultural exports plummeted. While U.S. exports of automobiles between 1932 and 1934 rose 110 percent and iron and steel exports 125 percent, exports of major farm commodities collapsed. Agricultural economist O.B. Jesness summed up the government's attitude toward crop exports: "It has been common among representatives of the AAA to express the view that foreign markets are gone and that all we can do is mourn their loss." Assistant Secretary of Agriculture M.L. Wilson declared, "Concerted cooperated crop control for American agriculture just now is necessary to compensate for the virtual loss of the foreign market."

Since the 1930s politicians have viewed farm prices as tickets for votes rather than as signals to producers and consumers.

American farmers were badly hurt by the loss of export markets in the 1930s. As agricultural economist Ashner Hobson observed in 1935, "The cause [of surpluses] is not so much that we are producing more, but rather that we are selling less abroad.... While declining agricultural exports may not have caused the depression, certainly their loss contributed substantially

to its severity." But the AAA officials had complete faith in the program's ability to enrich farmers by manipulating farm markets. And it was extremely difficult to manipulate markets as long as the United States was still tied to world prices.

Manipulating prices

Since the 1930s politicians have viewed farm prices as tickets for votes rather than as signals to producers and consumers, and have believed that they can drive up prices without disrupting agriculture. The Roosevelt administration manipulated prices with carefree abandon. As Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau noted in his diary,

On the night of October 16th [1933], as I was spending a quiet evening at home, the telephone rang. It was the President. "We have got to do something about the price of wheat," he said, strain and weariness apparent in his tone. "I can't take it any longer.... Can't you buy 25,000,000 bushels for Harry Hopkins and see if you can't put the price up?" I started in on the buying game first thing in the morning. Wheat was perched precariously at 64 and 7/8 when I placed the first

order for one million bushels. By the end of the day we had worked it up 10 cents. “Squeeze the life out of the shorts,” FDR said to me, with the old fight in his voice, “and put the price up just as far as you can.”

Politicians soon realized that to benefit farmers, they must control them.

Jesse Jones, chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), had a similar tale about cotton prices:

One afternoon in 1933, President Roosevelt called me to the White House and, as soon as I entered his office, said: “Jess, I want you to lend 10 cents a pound on cotton. Cotton was then selling around 9 cents. The law which created the RFC stated clearly that we should lend only on “full and adequate security.” Therefore, to lend 10 cents a pound on cotton when it was selling at 9 and less, was not easy. I did not tell the President we could not do it. I took it to be my job to find a way to do it because I thought cotton was worth more than 10 cents and that to

lend that amount of it would be very helpful and entail no loss to the government.

By promising farmers far more than the market value of their crops, the New Deal encouraged farmers to produce far more than could be sold at government-controlled prices. After the politicians induced the overproduction, they cited crop surpluses as proof of the need for political management of agriculture. Politicians soon realized that to benefit farmers, they must control them.

The AAA was a hotbed of radicals and, according to historian Arthur Schlesinger, there was a communist clique in the legal and policy-making branch, where Alger Hiss worked. Schlesinger is careful to point out that “nothing of importance took place in AAA as a result of [the communists’] presence in AAA which liberals would not have done anyway.” It is unclear whether Schlesinger’s remark was intended as a compliment to the liberals or to the communists.

The federal government in the 1930s and early 1940s attempted many experiments with local socialism. In 1935 Rexford Guy Tugwell, who was undersecretary of agriculture, declared, “Redistribution of our essential wealth, the

land, is the clearest mandate our society has received from economic necessities of the present depression.” George Mitchell, who was the assistant administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Resettlement Administration, declared in 1941 that the “ownership of [private] property is the greatest detriment to our national prosperity.” The Farm Security Administration (FSA) bought more than a million acres of land and then locked many poor farmers into 99-year leases with close supervision. The FSA intended to supervise the farmer, his son, and his grandson, and was denounced for trying to introduce serfdom into America. Many of the FSA’s local socialized farm projects became renowned for their phenomenally low productivity.

The FSA bought more than a million acres of land and then locked many poor farmers into 99-year leases.

Ruining farmers

Roosevelt’s farm programs were a tangle of contradictions. At the same time his administration was paying farmers to plant less, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Grand Coulee Dam, and other dams

were justified partly as creating millions of new acres of farmland. In 1933 officials of the Roosevelt administration spoke of a massive plan to resettle six million unemployed city and town residents on the land to work as “subsistence farmers.” The economist Otis Durant Duncan observed, “The addition of more insolvent families to the farm population will undoubtedly lower the average per capita wealth of all farm people.” Will Rogers commented,

Well, we had thought that that foolishness had pretty well died out, but no, this year it springs up again. The government decided that the West should be settled again. The first settling on unoccupied land didn’t take, so they would, as they say in the movies, try a “retake.” So now they have issued an ultimatum that every ranchman shall take down all his “Drift” fences, all his pastures that are government land, and give the old ad reader in the papers another chance to starve to death. Principally they offer it to ex-soldiers. War wasn’t tough enough; they are going to dare ‘em to live on a government claim.

Joseph S. Davis, who had been the chief economist of the Federal Farm Board, declared in 1935 that AAA programs “have put the brakes on business recovery” by shutting down much of the cotton and corn support industries. In 1930 roughly 40 percent of all American farmers were tenants or sharecroppers. Yet the New Deal farm programs were designed almost solely for the benefit of landowners.

“About one-third of the present rural unemployment can be directly referred to the [cotton] reduction program.”

Former USDA chief economist Don Paarlberg observed, “The agricultural elite, generally the large landowners, managed to retain most of the program benefits for themselves rather than share them with tenants or employees.” In 1934 the USDA paid cotton producers to slash cotton production, giving the landlord four cents a pound and the sharecropper only one-half cent per pound for production forgone. William B. Anderson reported in *The Nation* in early 1935, “In the richer Delta country there was relatively little unemployment until the winter of 1933-34, when the reduc-

tion program began to exert its influence. We believe it is fair to say that over the whole cotton belt about one-third of the present rural unemployment can be directly referred to the [cotton] reduction program.”

New Deal agricultural programs were a dismal failure at returning prosperity to the farm. Ezra Taft Benson, secretary of agriculture under Dwight Eisenhower, noted that “cash farm income, less government payments, did not reach the 1929 level until 1941, a war year.” Farmland values continued to decline throughout the 1930s and only began rising after World War II became imminent. The continuing decline of farmland value was the clearest vote of no confidence in government agricultural controls by farmers.

Even after the start of World War II, the USDA failed to release controls on production. The huge bureaucracy had spent its career throttling production; once the war began, it was difficult to teach an old dog a new trick. The USDA was so worried about the possibility that a huge crop surplus would result after the war’s end that it continued controls on production until 1944. As political scientist Charles Hardin observed, the USDA was “skept-

tical about the predictions of European postwar food needs” and reluctant to provide storage facilities to store surplus U.S. grain. The Twentieth Century Fund reported in 1953 that, thanks in part to U.S. food production cutbacks during the war years, much of western Europe “came desperately near to mass starvation in 1946 and 1947.” Food shortages in the Allied occupied zones in Germany were horrendous, helping to send the civilian mortality rate into the stratosphere. Only good weather and bumper harvests in the immediate postwar years prevented much worse disasters.

One lesson from the New Deal farm follies: It will take more than pervasive debacles to get Obama-

care repealed. Americans need to recognize that politicians cannot be trusted to manipulate supply and demand and prices — because taxpayers and consumers will always get shafted in the end.

James Bovard serves as policy adviser to The Future of Freedom Foundation and is the author of a new ebook memoir, Public Policy Hooligan, as well as Attention Deficit Democracy and eight other books.

NEXT MONTH:
**“How Trade Wars Shaped
Early America, Part 1”**
by James Bovard

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes.

— *Marcel Proust*

Class Theory, Part I: Modern Conservative Class Analysis

by Anthony Gregory



Since the 2008 financial collapse, class rhetoric has arisen on both prevalent sides of the U.S. political spectrum. The grassroots “base” in both the Republican and Democratic party has become animated by a new or invigorated perception of class struggle. The politicians in each party have echoed these themes. While both sides see themselves as defending the oppressed or the neglected common person against the establishment, for the most part the two movements have looked upon each other with hostility, seeing more allies in the very halls of power they claim are so irredeemably corrupt than in the crowds agitating for reform on the other side of the political spectrum.

The populist Right has taken to the Tea Party movement, energized by the 2008 TARP bailouts and the election of Barack Obama — a president regarded as out of step with mainstream America and sometimes depicted as a socialist attempting to overthrow the nation’s putative free-enterprise system. That movement, taking its name from the subversive civil disobedience of the American Revolution, can claim some nominal lineage from the largely libertarian Ron Paul presidential campaign of 2007 and 2008. However, it became clear that by the time Obama was sworn in and the Tea Party rallies began to proliferate, the general flavor of the movement was not as “in line” with Paul’s message as the much smaller Tea Party rallies during the tail end of the Bush administration had been.

American conservatism since late 2008 and early 2009 has adopted an anti-government, anti-establishment theme that was not nearly as prevalent on the Right during the George W. Bush administration, when its primary goals were to bolster the administration’s war on terrorism and social conservative policies on marriage and other issues. The economic emphasis, brought on by the financial meltdown, the bipartisan rescue package, the re-

surge of Keynesianism, Obama's flagship health-care law, and other reforms involving expansions of domestic government, refocused much of the conservative movement on its tenets that are most critical of government and Washington, and has to that extent diminished as a priority the question of foreign policy, on which the modern Right has tended toward interventionism.

The Tea Party sees the main political struggle as one between big government and everyday Americans.

Along with its new identification as the movement to curb government growth and guard against Washington corruption and power, the Tea Party movement has adopted, if sometimes implicitly, a class analysis that sees the main political struggle as one between big government (especially its taxing and regulating) and everyday Americans. Culturally, the proxy for the hero and victim is seen in bourgeois society, the nuclear family, the working and entrepreneurial classes. Geographically, there is a tendency to see the "red" states — middle America, or as it is sometimes dismissively called, "fly-over country"

— as the home of real Americans, pitted against the "blue"-state establishment that is most firmly planted on both U.S. coasts and in the cities. Key figures speaking on behalf of the forgotten Americans are celebrities such as Sarah Palin and Glenn Beck, who at his media height enjoyed the highest-rated commentary news show on air.

The country class

Nowhere has the class analysis implicitly embraced by the Tea Party been more explicitly described than in the work of Angelo Codevilla, whose *American Spectator* article "America's Ruling Class and the Perils of Revolution" explicitly pits the minority ruling class against the majority "country class." Conservative talk-radio host Rush Limbaugh wrote the introduction to Codevilla's book that expanded on this theme, *The Ruling Class: How They Corrupted America and What We Can Do about It* (Beaufort Books 2010). In it Limbaugh calls the Tea Party "the modern equivalent of our founding revolutionaries ... [who] need a political mechanism in order to revolt against and replace the ruling class." The introduction is not uncritical of the conservative wing of the political elite, yet it has a clear partisan and ideological bias: "Re-

publicans are the way they are in Washington because Washington is a culture and a place that is run and dominated — not just politically, but socially — by Democrats, by the left.”

Codevilla’s book presents a good example of populist conservative class consciousness. He does not see wealth as the primary determinant of whether someone belongs to the ruling class. While its members are wealthy, they “are no wealthier than many Texas oilmen or California farmers” whom Codevilla does not count as part of the ruling class.

“What really distinguishes these privileged people demographically,” Codevilla explains, “is that, whether in government power directly or as officers in companies, their careers and fortunes depend on government. They vote Democrat more consistently than those who live on any of America’s Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. streets.” The author goes so far as to argue that “it is possible to be an official or a major corporation or a member of the U.S. Supreme Court (just ask Justice Clarence Thomas), or even president of the nation (Ronald Reagan), and not be taken seriously by the Ruling Class.” While “Republicans salivate for [the] status” of privilege that the ruling class enjoys, they

rarely obtain it. To make that point, Codevilla argues that liberal ruling-class members get away with all sorts of malfeasance, such as academic corruption, more easily than conservatives do. For those aware of the vast unpunished corruption among the highest Reagan and Bush administration officials, that might seem like a dubious point.

Codevilla does not see wealth as the primary determinant of whether someone belongs to the ruling class.

Codevilla prioritizes the culture war. The ruling class is largely secular and urban, all educated in a similar mold, and united in perceiving the bulk of the American people as “retrograde, racist, and dysfunctional unless properly constrained” and conservatives as “maladjusted, ne’er-do-well ignoramuses.” Repeatedly Codevilla argues that the ruling class is characterized by a hostility to Christianity and traditional Judaism.

The country class, in contrast, “defines itself practically in terms of reflexive reactions against the rulers’ defining ideas and proclivities — e.g., ever-higher taxes and expanding government, subsidizing political favorites, social engineering,

approval of abortion, etc.” The inclusion of abortion as a theme ties into the country class’s culture-war identification. While Codevilla calls members of the country class “heterogeneous,” mostly defined by their exploitation by the rulers, he puts a definite conservative cast on them. They support civil society, both the voluntary sector and entrepreneurial sector, believe people are born equal, and include “those who take the side of outsiders against insiders, of small institutions against large ones, of local government against those at the state or federal level. The Country Class is convinced that big business, big government, and big finance are linked as never before, and that ordinary people are more unequal than ever.” Yet they are also defined by their “most distinguishing characteristics ... marriage, children, and religious practice.” They are skeptical of Darwinism, opposed to abortion, and seek “the restoration of traditional police powers over behavior in public places.”

One passage highlights the cultural resentment as it dovetails with victimization at the hands of the state:

Americans drive big cars, eat lots of meat and other unhealthy things, and go to the

doctor whenever they feel like it. Americans think it is just to spend the money they earn to satisfy their private desires, even though the Ruling Class knows that justice lies in improving the community and the planet. The Ruling Class knows that Americans must learn to live more densely and closer to work, that they must drive smaller cars ... that they must accept limits on how much medical care they get.

“The Country Class is convinced that ... ordinary people are more unequal than ever.”

Among Codevilla’s most astute observations are those concerning the corporate state’s economic exploitation of the masses. “Whatever else government may be, it is inherently a factory of privilege and inequality,” he writes, striking a very libertarian note. “By taxing and parceling out more than a third of what Americans produce, through regulations that reach deep into American life, our Ruling Class is making itself the arbiter of wealth and poverty.” In particular, he condemns crony capitalism, whereby the “regulators and the regulated

become indistinguishable, and they prosper together because they have the power to restrict the public's choices." He identifies corporatism in the bailouts but also in environmental regulations. Codevilla contends that the ruling class will countenance only economic approaches conducive to "finishing the transformation of America into an administrative state."

Codevilla identifies corporatism in the bailouts but also in environmental regulations.

Nationalism and war

The country class's tension with the ruling class is at its most paradoxical concerning nationalism. Codevilla argues that America's modern wars are largely harmful to the country. Yet it is the country class that is most supportive of American nationalism and the military as an institution:

The Country Class believes that America's ways are superior to the rest of the world's, and regards most of mankind as less free, less prosperous, and less virtuous than Americans. The class also takes part in the U.S. armed forces, body

and soul: nearly all the enlisted, non-commissioned officers and officers under flag rank belong to this class in every measurable way. Few vote for the Democratic Party. You do not doubt that you are amid the Country Class rather than the Ruling Class when the American flag passes by or "God Bless America" is sung after seven innings of baseball, and most people show reverence.

This is where the analysis faces the greatest complications. Nothing expands the state like war. Aware of the tension between liberty and frugal government and imperialism, Codevilla argues that the country class favors the military, but not perpetual war:

Because our Ruling Class deems unsophisticated the American people's perennial preference for decisive military action or none, its default solution to international threats has been to commit blood and treasure to long-term, twilight efforts to reform the world's Vietnams, Somalias, Iraqs, and Afghani-stans, believing that changing hearts and minds is the pre-

requisite of peace, and that it knows how to change them.

That would appear to be wishful thinking. Most conservative Americans — the people most enamored of God, family, and flag — were enthusiastic supporters of George W. Bush's endless war policies, and they were the least supportive of ending the wars at any given point over the last decade. Although Codevilla attempts to blame indefinite war on the cultural opponents of the country class, the people he identifies are at least as responsible as anyone else. By encouraging enlistment in their families and voting for the most interventionist of politicians, they are not mere passive participants in empire.

Codevilla is correct that when Obama apologizes on behalf of American society — for supposed environmental sins, nuclear bombs, wars, or slavery in the past — he is “not apologizing for anything he or anyone he respected had done, but rather blaming his fellow Americans for not doing what he thinks they should do.” The country class's response, however, seems to be that the U.S. government never owes an apology to anyone, which is not at all the right attitude for fostering Jeffersonian government.

In practice Codevilla argues that to liberate the country class means “reducing the taxes that most Americans resent,” which in turn “requires eliminating the network of subsidies to millions of other Americans that these taxes finance.” But how many of those subsidies come in the form of benefits enjoyed by the very Americans Codevilla would put in the country class?

Romney implied that the poorest recipients of social spending did not consider themselves on balance victims of the state.

In 2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney made waves when, unbeknownst to him, someone recorded his remark that he had no interest in the 47 percent of tax consumers who would predictably vote for Obama. It energized the Tea Party types who favored that form of class division. Romney dismissed those who were “dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe that government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you name it.” In doing so, he implied that the poorest recipients of

social spending did not consider themselves on balance victims of the state, and were a major parasitic class against which the Republican Party had to contend.

And yet, how many of the poorest Americans would Codevilla put in the country class? How many of them vote Republican? How many of them come from military families or attend conservative churches?

Left-liberal critiques of Tea Party class analysis

Many progressive politicians, commentators, progressive journalists, and celebrities have derided the Tea Party movement, often taking issue with the class consciousness so prevalent among its populist activists. Despite some anomalous pro-Tea Party leftists, the progressives have mostly looked upon the movement with hostility, seeing the rhetoric of class consciousness as an appropriation from the supposedly more-genuine leftist concerns about defending the weak against the strong. Left-progressives see the Republican-voting Tea Parties as unwitting shells for the establishment more than opponents of oppression, describing them as an “AstroTurf” movement rather than a genuine grassroots uprising. No less a luminary than Paul Krugman

wrote in an April 2009 *New York Times* column characteristic of the progressive view,

[It] turns out that the tea parties don't represent a spontaneous outpouring of public sentiment. They're AstroTurf (fake grass roots) events, manufactured by the usual suspects. In particular, a key role is being played by FreedomWorks, an organization run by Richard Armey, the former House majority leader, and supported by the usual group of right-wing billionaires. And the parties are, of course, being promoted heavily by Fox News.

“[It] turns out that the tea parties don't represent a spontaneous outpouring of public sentiment.”

This view of the Tea Parties as a corporate Trojan Horse led some progressive commentators to view even civil-liberties issues in a different light. Writing for *The Nation* in November 2010, progressives Mark Ames and Yasha Levine wrote,

As the first reporters to expose the Tea Party as an AstroTurf PR campaign funded

by FreedomWorks and Koch-related front groups back in February, 2009, we see many of the same elements driving the current “rebellion” against the TSA: Koch-related libertarians, Washington lobbyists and PR operatives posing as “ordinary citizens,” and suspicious fake-grassroots outrage relentlessly promoted in the same old right-wing echo chamber.

The critique that the Tea Party is not truly a people’s movement has been central to the liberal response, along with the somewhat paradoxical disparagement of the movement for being unkempt and unsophisticated. A key theme in left-progressive criticisms of conservative populists has always been that they are unconscious pawns for the establishment who vote against their own economic interests, and that has also continued in light of the Tea Party.

The critique that the Tea Party is not truly a people’s movement has been central to the progressive response.

Other criticism has focused on the alleged racism of the Tea Party movement, a point that seems plau-

sible to some because the movement came into its own just when America’s first black president came to power. Actress Janeane Garofalo, a political activist speaking for a wide swath of the progressive Left, has repeatedly made that point:

Let’s be very honest about what this is about. This is not about bashing Democrats. It’s not about taxes. They have no idea what the Boston Tea Party was about. They don’t know their history at all. It’s about hating a black man in the White House. This is racism straight up and is nothing but a bunch of ... rednecks. There is no way around that.

So convinced of this narrative, Garofalo made the news two years later with her explanation for the populist Right’s profound admiration for black Republican politician Herman Cain:

Herman Cain is probably well liked by some of the Republicans because it hides the racist elements of the Republican Party. Conservative movement and Tea Party movement, one in [sic] the same. People like Karl Rove liked to

keep the racism very covert. And so Herman Cain provides this great opportunity so he can say, “Look, this is not a racist, anti-immigrant, anti-female, anti-gay movement. Look, we have a black man.”

The other major criticism of Tea Party populists is the claim that they are so anti-government that they pose something approaching a terrorist threat to society. That has been the position outlined by such groups as the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Homeland Security Department. Taken altogether, the posture of the anti-Tea Party Left boils down essentially to two elements: the defense of the president and his government against a movement accused of bigotry, extremism, and ignorance, and the claim that the movement is not

truly anti-establishment at all, but rather a front for corporate interests. There is some validity to some of these critiques that libertarians should appreciate, but before advancing my own evaluation of Tea Party class analysis, I first wish to look at the movement’s left-wing counterpart: the Occupy movement that arose in late 2011.

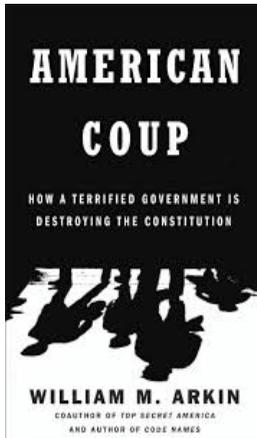
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NEXT MONTH:
“Class Theory, Part 2: Modern Progressive Class Analysis”
by Anthony Gregory

A Treacherous Undertow

by David D'Amato

American Coup: How a Terrified Government Is Destroying the Constitution by William M. Arkin (Little, Brown and Company 2013), 368 pages.



Among the philosophy of liberty's core ideas is the well-known precept that a free society must be one of laws and not of men, that the rule of law should stand above the arbitrary caprice of some empowered group. The undermining of this precept in favor of the bureaucratic rule of special emergency managers is the subject of William M. Arkin's *American*

Coup: How a Terrified Government Is Destroying the Constitution. Arkin is no mere dilettante in the study of the despotic; a Cold War army-intelligence agent, investigative journalist, and author of several books, he has given decades to delving into the labyrinthine world of the U.S. national-security apparatus, a cryptic subject too often hidden from the view of the average observer. Tying together a series of events that have empowered what Arkin calls "the XYZs of the extraordinary," *American Coup* pulls back the curtain of secrecy to reveal an often-disturbing confirmation of so much that libertarians suspect. Arkin's "XYZs" are the framework situated in opposition to the government of laws (the "ABCs") that Americans take for granted, a counter-constitutional legal world hidden by and "codified through decades of deliberate concealment."

The result is a small ruling cabal, able to control policy on a national scale not through any conscious or deliberate conspiracy, but rather owing to a continuing sequence of ostensible emergencies; their power is, in theory, contingent on extraordinary security circumstances, yet in practice it has functioned as a self-sustaining, shadow legal system, commensurate to a

bloodless coup. The bedrock of the insidious executive power Arkin illustrates is a complacent and overarching trust in the omniscience of apparent experts, the technocrats in federal bureaucracies who supposedly *know better* than the rest of us. They have managed to gradually wrest governing power, to concentrate it in that formless space of regulatory authority between actual, black-letter laws. Their appeal to discretion as experts is the source of their ill-defined power. All of that Arkin calls “the Program,” “an entity and group” he analogizes to Wall Street, a synecdoche we use to mean not only the place itself, but “also allusively the entirety of interests” we associate with it.

Throughout *American Coup*, Arkin is careful to demonstrate that the situation he is detailing in the book is not at all partisan in nature, driven less by ideology than by the faceless momentum of institutional interests. Spanning the presidencies of both political parties, the consistent, uniting strand, said Arkin in an interview with *Foreign Policy*, is “a contempt for (if not a profound fear of) the citizenry.” This unelected manager-class elite sees ordinary Americans as an “other” to be watched and suppressed, and itself as guardians capable of governing dur-

ing “extraordinary” circumstances. The Program illustrated by Arkin thus carries fundamentally the psychology of a conquering force.

This unelected manager-class elite sees ordinary Americans as an “other” to be watched and suppressed.

In reading Arkin’s book, the chilling words of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* come in an unbroken echo: “The social atmosphere is that of a besieged city... [The] consciousness of being at war, and therefore in danger, makes the handing-over of all power to a small caste seem the natural, unavoidable condition of survival.” Given that a perpetual state of panic is a necessary precondition to the executive-branch hegemony and martial life Arkin chronicles, there emerges the interest in promoting the semblance of constant threats. The continued sway of the invisible XYZs, animated by crisis, demands that we never actually receive the safety and security we are endlessly promised by the political class.

Arkin’s thesis updates and amends the conceptual edifice of the military-industrial complex for the 21st century, describing an “interchangeable” elite of “the corpo-

rate world,” “civilian experts and those in uniform.” *American Coup* therefore adds not only to a libertarian analysis of the security state, but also to a thoroughgoing treatment of sociological issues related to class, offering a revealing glimpse at the workings of power today. And the power of the Program works precisely because — being itself so nebulous in nature — all of the old whipping boys can conveniently take the blame. Americans are able to choose whichever superficial entity they want to play demon of the week, and behind it all agents of the executive’s various bodies act with impunity, without answering to the American people.

In the world of the “information complex,” midlevel mandarins with security clearances exercise surprising power.

Arkin observes that while power is increasingly condensed in those agencies, it is “working-class stiff,” “men and women who toil for years out of the spotlight,” who make up the Program itself. In the world of the “information complex,” midlevel mandarins with security clearances and access to top agency secretaries exercise surprising power; they are like *Nineteen*

Eighty-Four’s protagonist, Winston Smith, a member not of the top-most Inner Party, but of the second-tier, the Outer Party. His access to secret information and his occupation of rewriting history in real time gave him a power that even he could not fully appreciate. Through the XYZs of what Arkin calls “the forever war,” a growing group of Winston Smiths — subject-matter experts, government contractors, and technocrats — have ascended to a position of dominance.

Decentralist principles

Libertarian readers of *American Coup* may be reminded of Robert Higgs’s *Crisis and Leviathan*. Higgs’s book is a study of “the enduring legacies of programs first created to deal with temporary crises,” tracing the growth of the United States government as a corollary of those programs. Higgs’s work posits the theory of a “ratchet effect,” a leveraging of crisis — conscious or not — to expand the power and “the scope of effective governmental authority.” The relationship between the respective theses of Arkin and Higgs becomes apparent immediately. While Higgs focuses his attention on the growth of the state, and Arkin on the development of a parallel body of rules and a shrouded elite,

the objects of their study are in fact impossible to separate. The centralization and unaccountability of power so thoroughly brought to light by Arkin is an unavoidable concomitant of government growth — and the reverse is also true. *American Coup* is brimming with unassailable evidence in support of libertarianism's decentralist impulse, which would devolve power down to the most local, and thus responsive, possible entity; indeed, that ultimately means all the way back to the sovereign individual.

Using relief work after Hurricane Katrina as an example, Arkin zeroes in on the problems that arise when the national government overbearingly pushes more local bodies to the margins. Those problems, related to incentives and basic logistical realities, show that libertarians' distrust of distant, centralized authority (and our related emphasis on less-remote institutions), is not some idle, aesthetic preference. "One reason that federal assistance in New Orleans was such a failure," Arkin notes, "was that the executive agents who tend to love such seizures of power from local authorities also have little interest in locals, period." It simply stands to reason that the local community will be both more in-

vested and more aware of the unique subtleties presented by its familiar home environment.

American Coup is brimming with unassailable evidence in support of libertarianism's decentralist impulse.

The dichotomy developed by Arkin, that between the ABCs and the XYZs, finds the U.S. Constitution in the former category, along with other presumed proper legal channels, and contrasted with the "essence of executive tyranny our forefathers feared." Each time the system of XYZs is instantiated, then, Arkin suggests that it is fundamentally irreconcilable with our "constitutional design." But for many libertarians this kind of constitutionalism belies the historical realities behind the Constitution. Indeed the Constitution we have inherited from the founding generation was a victory (even if not a perfect one) for the Federalists, the proponents of centralized power and a strong executive branch — exactly the features of the U.S. government treated by Arkin's thesis.

The decentralist principles so rightly celebrated by Arkin and distinguished from the arbitrary power and unaccountability that wor-

ries him are in fact not those of the Constitution. If there were decentralists present at the time of Philadelphia's Constitutional Convention debates, they were the Antifederalists, those skeptical of the executive power embraced by the Constitution, which they saw as "the fetus of monarchy." The Antifederalist Patrick Henry famously declined even to attend the Convention as a delegate, saying that he "smelt a rat." While it is unlikely that any among the founding generation could have imagined the federal government Arkin criticizes, the Constitution nevertheless instituted all of its prerequisite conditions.

It is a mistake, then, to regard most of the Framers as libertarian localists. Typifying the overarching opinion of the Federalists, James Madison, often called the Father of the Constitution, wrote that the new design of government must "support a due supremacy of the national authority." In *American Coup*, we have a fully developed image of that supremacy and the danger it poses to civil society.

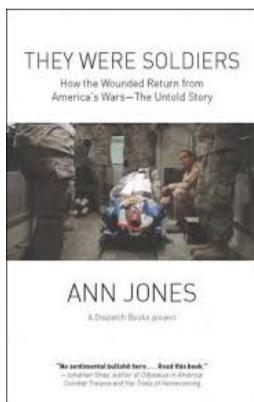
The potential for tyranny emerges at the moment a small, supposedly special group is granted authority to coercively control all of society. And the reasons for such grants of authority almost always seem to be sound at the moment they are advanced. At times of emergency, the temptation to put faith in the expertise of officialdom is a strong pull. William Arkin's *American Coup* deftly shows that that pull is in fact a treacherous undertow with the capacity to secure permanent military tyranny. The proverbial ostrich, head buried in the sand, should avoid Arkin's alarming study, but for the rest of us the book exposes a pressing truth about the state of American life. One is left to hope that the many lessons contained therein are not ignored.

David S. D'Amato is an attorney with an LL.M. in international law and business.

Broken

by *Matthew Harwood*

They Were Soldiers: How the Wounded Return from America's Wars — The Untold Story by Ann Jones (Haymarket Books/Dispatch Books 2013), 191 pages.



Members of the American armed forces are props. They wave from convertibles as Independence Day parades make their way down Main Street U.S.A. They are trotted out at football games to bless the proceedings as some kind of martial event. They wish us happy holidays from countries many Americans can't find on a map. The traditional narrative is that these men and women are the best of us. They risk life and more

likely than not limb to protect us from al-Qaeda or rogue states such as Iraq or Iran. They are the vanguard of liberty, knocking down odious regimes so that freedom can be planted in foreign soil and contribute to a democratic peace sometime in the near future.

Ann Jones will have none of that. Her *They Were Soldiers* is a suppurating wound of a book — the 21st-century equivalent of Dalton Trumbo's horrifying antiwar novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*. It's an embedded look at how America's wounded return from its wars, divided into three parts: the wounds you can't miss, the wounds hiding just below the surface, and the wounds violently shared with the families and communities they come home to. Haunting and uncompromising, Jones's book wants to grip the American public by its collective face and waterboard it into the nightmare of war and its aftermath — no tales of valor, no talk of bands of brotherhood, no nonsense about making the world safe for democracy.

Rather she writes about unnecessary death and dismemberment and the utter horror of war and its aftermath in intelligently restrained prose, her outrage only flashing through sporadically, like lightning on a darkened plain. It's a book that

whispers, “Here’s what war is really like, young buck. Let it seep in before you sign on the dotted line and you no longer belong to you.” Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that rip soldiers’ genitals into a fleshy mess or that vaporize soldiers into a red rain showering down on their brothers-in-arms ... troops who betray their consciences and commit atrocities that haunt them, regardless of how many drinks or pills they swallow ... families beside themselves with grief, not because their sons never returned home, but because they did, only changed ... soldiers who wear the uniform, not to serve their countries, but because it gives them an opportunity to act out their ghastly urges and get slaps on the back for it — that is the Army of One hidden by the Pentagon from the young and the foolhardy, who see themselves as invincible, as kids are apt to do.

Broken in body

The advance of modern medicine has significantly reduced the American fatalities in the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, even as IEDs become more and more powerful. While that seems like something to cheer, often the nature of troops’ injuries described by Jones shows that there are things far worse

than death. As a Navy surgeon told her, after two months at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan, “Nothing in my experience prepared me for the catastrophic nature of these injuries.” Case in point: his first surgical patient, a young soldier upended by an IED. “To have to amputate that boy’s penis and watch it go into the surgical waste container — it was emotional.” An ER nurse, also at Bagram, summarized her typical case: “Amputees up to the waist. No arms. No legs. No genitals. Age 21 or 22. We cry.” Medical staff try to find silver linings in all this hurt.

Often the nature of troops’ injuries described by Jones shows that there are things far worse than death.

A trauma-unit doctor tells Jones that the cutting-edge medical procedures developed during war eventually improve civilian medicine. “Maybe so,” writes Jones, “but I wonder if this is to be the civilians’ reward for paying taxes into the war chest: the possibility of getting a combat-experienced brain surgeon when we’re shot in the head at the mall.”

Invisible wounds

Other grave injuries fly under the radar. This “invisible wound,” as

Jones describes it, is traumatic brain injury (TBI). Known to earlier generations as “shell shock,” TBI presents an enormous challenge to military neurologists, writes Jones, because “if the wound is invisible, how can you spot it?” Often brain scans will come back perfectly normal even though the patient’s brain is badly damaged. Rest is the generally prescribed treatment for TBI, but because there’s no empirical evidence of injury, the military fears creating incentives for soldiers to shirk duty. “The military command, always on the lookout for malingerers, also worries about treating soldiers too well,” notes Jones. “Give some soldier a diagnosis and a break, and others will soon present themselves with similar symptoms — or so the classic argument goes — and the next thing you know, they will all be applying for disability benefits.”

Conversely, injured veterans and service members are fed, often irresponsibly, a pharmacological diet of pills by military and private doctors, courtesy of Big Pharma. In 2001 Purdue Pharma, makers of OxyContin, spent hundreds of thousands of dollars marketing its poppy-based painkiller, the same plant that soldiers would soon be eradicating in Afghanistan, to the

Department of Veterans Affairs. Nine years and two wars later, Big Pharma was making serious bank, and veterans weren’t the only target. “One third of the soldiers in the Army were on prescription medications in 2010, and nearly half of them — 76,500 — were on opioid painkillers,” Jones writes.

Injured veterans and service members are fed, often irresponsibly, a pharmacological diet of pills.

Sometimes they’re peddled like Tic Tacs for the slightest of injuries. One mother told Jones that an Army doctor prescribed her son, Lance Pilgrim, OxyContin for a broken finger. Soon her son was using the pills to deal with whatever nastiness he experienced during the invasion of Iraq. In 2007 an Army treatment center prescribed hydrocodone, another opioid, after kicking him out for fighting with another veteran. Pilgrim died two days later of an overdose. His mother doesn’t know whether it was intentional or a mistake.

Broken in spirit

All service members who don’t die in theater eventually head home. Whether physically wound-

ed or not, all have to adjust to civilian life. The war, they find out like Lance Pilgrim, follows them wherever they go.

Jeffrey Lucey, a Marine reservist, returned home in the summer of 2003. Things went downhill fast. He drank excessively, vomited daily, and lost his appetite. He crashed two cars. He didn't sleep. He became withdrawn, refusing to go to family Christmas parties. On Christmas Eve his sister checked up on him and found him crying. He took two Iraqi dog tags from around his neck and threw them at her, uttering, "Your brother is nothing but a murderer." One night the next summer Jeff sat down on his father Kevin's lap. He did that when he was a boy, and he began doing it again after he returned from Iraq. The next time Kevin saw his son, he was hanging in the cellar, a double-looped plastic hose around his neck. Neatly laid out on his bed were the two Iraqi dog tags he had thrown at his sister on Christmas Eve. Before he died Jeff had admitted, in his father's presence during a visit to a VA psychiatrist, to executing two Iraqi prisoners. The Marines said they investigated and found Jeff's allegations false.

His parents knew their son wasn't lying.

The Luceys were not quiet about what war had done to their son and what he did in war. They spoke with the media and at public gatherings and schools frequently. They were scheduled to testify before Congress about their son's unraveling, but their invitation was revoked when congressional schedulers learned that they had consorted with antiwar groups. "The irony that the story of their soldier son's fate is off limits only within the government that sent him to war is not lost upon the Luceys," writes Jones. It is telling that soldiers connected the Luceys to antiwar groups and asked them to speak out against the war because service members cannot while in uniform.

Jeff Lucey was one of the 2,293 service members who committed suicide between 9/11 and September 2011.

But it really isn't surprising that neither Congress nor the Pentagon wants to face publicly the tremendous toll of war on America's boys and girls. Jeff Lucey was one of the 2,293 service members who committed suicide between 9/11 and September 2011, a very conservative estimate, according to Iraq Veterans Against the War, because the

Pentagon doesn't count suicides of service members who have been thrown out of the military or who have resigned their post. When asked by Congress to explain the suicide crisis in the military, the Pentagon had a list of "stressors" — such as relationship issues, work-related problems, money problems, legal problems, drug- and alcohol-abuse problems — which could trigger suicide. "Conspicuously absent from the list of triggers of soldier suicide," Jones notes, "was the experience of war itself and the brutal betrayals of 'what's right' that lie at its heart."

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Which makes sense, because what politician or military official could possibly defend sending America's young off to wars of choice knowing full well what will befall them there? And who wants to consider that this epidemic of military suicides isn't just the result of post-traumatic stress syndrome caused by physical or psychic traumas experienced in war, but rather the inability of men and women to

live with themselves after invading nations and killing and murdering belligerents and innocent civilians alike? Is it so hard to believe that instead of facing a perpetual dark night of the soul every second of every day, many, like Jeff Lucey, opt for a permanent midnight?

Instead, American culture glorifies the heroic, sacrificing (or sacrificial) soldier in the abstract, with no real concern for the individual men and women who give up their lives — whether they die or not — for a lie.

Horrific homecomings

The darkness doesn't just stalk those who return from Iraq and Afghanistan; sometimes it becomes them. And out of that darkness, a fiery rage builds up in their bowels. The fire often doesn't remain inside. Rather it consumes the ones they love, and sometimes the fire engulfs everything around them.

Jones documents incident after incident of military members, always male, raping, brutalizing, and murdering comrades, family members, and people at random. Here's just a choice selection from 2012 cataloged by Jones. Army veteran Benjamin Colton Barnes, 24, shoots up a house party on New Year's Day and then flees to Mount Rainier

National Park, where he kills a park ranger. He dies after drowning in a frigid stream. Two weeks later, former Marine and Iraq war veteran, Itzcoatl Ocampo, 23, is suspected of murdering six: the mother and brother of a high-school friend and four homeless men arbitrarily. Also that January, Army Sergeant Vincente L. Jackson murders a female soldier by strangling and stabbing her 74 times. Seven months later, Army veteran Stephen Carriero, 25, attacks an 82-year-old woman and murders her 62-year-old daughter “after raping and sodomizing her with instruments the police refused to name.” And on and on. If you don’t believe her, Jones recommends Googling “veterans’ homicides” or “veterans’ crimes” and then you can “write a chapter like this yourself, if you can bear the work.”

“Many of the murders smacked of something truly threatening — a kind of private warfare waged by soldiers who had got the hang of killing and the habit.”

Sometimes it’s hard not to speculate that some of the men are punishing us because they were sent off to immoral and unwinnable wars that turned them into something else altogether. “Many of the mur-

ders smacked of something truly threatening — a kind of private warfare waged by soldiers who had got the hang of killing and the habit,” writes Jones. Do they want to make us bear witness to the monsters made by the negligence of collective bloodlust, which all too suddenly slid into apathy? Be warned, they seem to screaming: “The strings have been severed, and the marionettes have turned on their masters.” Their rage, however, hasn’t registered beyond the little radii of terror they’ve left in their short but terrible trails. Maybe that will change as many more killing machines, who cannot be reprogrammed for civilian life, return home from Afghanistan.

A con game

On a military flight back to the United States, an older Army officer — an adviser to the top counterterrorism official in Iraq, to be precise — waves Jones over to the seat beside him. He has something to tell her. “I’ve been in the army twenty-six years,” he says, “and I can tell you it’s a con.” He sums it up something like this: the poorest 1 percent go far away from home to kill and be killed in wars that make the other 1 percent “[expletive deleted] rich.” He’s on his way home, perma-

nently, because of “psych reasons.” He goes on to mention he has two sons, both in college. “They won’t have to serve,” he says. “Before that happens, I’ll shoot them myself.” Here Jones has found her very own U.S. Marine Maj. Gen. Smedley Butler, who’s telling us once again that “war is a racket” that serves the corporatists and the powerful, while grinding up all the sons and daughters, fathers and mothers sent to it. War, he’s telling us, is a criminal enterprise, one that traffics in murder, theft, and corruption. The beneficiaries: global gangsters with flags pinned to their lapels.

Before the invasion of Iraq, the U.S. military flew over Iraq and dropped leaflets warning Iraqis of the liberation coming their way very, very soon. How apt it would

be if someone flew over the Pentagon as well as every military recruiting office and dropped Ann Jones’s book — the journalistic equivalent of the flower in the rifle barrel. *They Were Soldiers* should be pushed across the kitchen table to any young man or woman thinking about enlisting, prominently displayed in every high-school library, and slapped into the chest of every chicken hawk who glorifies war but curiously never enlisted after 9/11. It’s a horror story of the most deeply disturbing kind: a true one.

Matthew Harwood is a free-lance writer living in Alexandria, Virginia. His work has appeared in The American Conservative, The Guardian, Reason, Salon, and Truthout.

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