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Empire, War, and the Greater Good

by Anthony Gregory

The following is a transcript of a speech given at The Future of Freedom Foundation's June 2008 conference, "Restoring the Republic: Foreign Policy & Civil Liberties" held in Reston, Virginia.

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Anthony Gregory: Hello. Well thank you, Bumper, this is a great honor. And I got to say, the way that he pronounced *Contra Costa* offends me, and we really need to keep the [hordes] out of this country or else they'll start renaming all of California in Spanish. But seriously, no, this is an amazing honor. And I didn't mention this last year, though I wanted to-- this is actually, I actually am back in my hometown. I was born just a few minutes from here in Fairfax County, and I spent the first few months of my life in Reston. So this is a treat in many ways.

Now we're used to hearing about political issues boiled down to a controversy or a conflict between the individual and the greater good. It seems that almost anyone's pet project for big government can be sold as a way to advance the public interest, the general welfare, and this is such an important goal

that mere individuals and their interests have to be pushed to the side. Now before relating this to war, it's important to reflect on what it means to take the individual's side on such questions.

It doesn't mean that we're atomistic, that we're very narrowly selfish. It doesn't mean that we oppose social cooperation; we oppose groups coming together, people forming organizations of law, family, community, and so forth. Nothing could be further from the truth. It's just that we see the individual as the premier unit of civil society. We believe that volunteerism is that from which groups of any value are formed. So we defend the family and churches and communities and honest business, but to the extent the individual and the individual's liberty, rights, and dignity are respected, these groups flourish, and society as a whole, the greater good, actually benefit, and of course to the extent that the individual is pushed to the side, they do not.

Another point that I would raise is that selfishness can't be abolished by the public sector. Whether we see it as benign or benevolent or malicious, the state doesn't eliminate this aspect of humanity. All it does is it elevates some individuals to a position of privilege, to a position of unchecked lawless authority over other individuals.

Now thankfully the premise of individualism has very strong roots in our culture. Certainly in the United States and in the West, and now in much of the world, there's a very strong individualist streak. Liberals and conservatives, left and right, there's a lot in common in this country. And I do like to occasionally reflect on the positives, because otherwise I think it's hard for us to have the energy to keep going forward against evil. But we see this on the left and right. When pro-lifers talk about abortion they think about the dignity and the rights, as they see it, of the individual fetus, whereas pro-choicers also see this as an issue of the personal liberty of the individual woman, and of course these people disagree, and I'm sure there's some disagreement here. But the fact that this idea permeates both sides of the argument is significant.

And on all sorts of issues we hear the individualist ethic come up. The Left defends the individual; sometimes the Right does. Now of course this is inconsistent because the same conservatives who talk about rugged individualism and respecting the rights of the person will attack the Left as being too concerned with hedonistic selfishness. They see every call for social tolerance as a cover for individual decadence, and on the flip side the Left will defend the right to choose of an individual, but then they'll attack the Right for covering up for greedy CEOs and caring only about their own checkbook. There might even be some truth to some of these complaints on a cultural level, but it's important to note the inconsistency here. And I think it's from this inconsistency that we have some of the problems that we do.

But nevertheless this individualism is very pervasive in the United States culture, and I think that in a very true sense it was the American ethic of individualism that did help stave off Communism, for example, taking root in this country. This was never this big of a threat. It wasn't because Reagan and everyone before him built up all these nuclear weapons and that's what saved us; it's because something like Communism would never actually take root in a culture that was as wedded to the individual; and of course I'm talking total Communism, not just Welfare Stateism, which unfortunately is pretty much everywhere.

Now the thing about war is there seems to be a double standard. Some of the loudest critics of the collectivist mentality become total collectivists when it comes to the military, the national security state, the warfare state, war itself, bombing. Let's think of one of the great individualist champions of our time, someone who's a hero to many people in our movement and an inspiration to a lot of people worldwide in the West, Ayn Rand. Now Rand did some very important work in her time. There was a very collectivist zeitgeist that she battled against, but when it came to foreign policy she didn't really apply this consistently. In her novella *Anthem*, which is my favorite work by her actually-- it's short, for one thing, and you can read it in a couple of hours. But it's a great little-- it's a great book, and there's this dystopian world, and the first-person protagonist lives in a totally collectivist world where at one point she discovers the word "I." She had been conditioned, along with all her culture, to only use the first-person pronoun "we." By discovering "I" she discovered the very concept of individualism, and this book's important in imparting the lesson that individualism is to a very large extent a cultural phenomenon.

But how did she talk about foreign policy? Usually in terms of "we." And she wasn't-- I'm going to address them in a second-- but she wasn't as bad as many of her followers. She was a critic of the Vietnam War, but she criticized it from the standpoint of "we." Why should we have to give our national treasure to benefit them? Those people who don't understand individualism. And this, there's something to this. It's better than saying that the U.S. should be constantly meddling everywhere, but there are limitations too. At her worst she would say such things as those savages, the Arab savages, stole our oil. I mean, how was it her oil? She should know better. But the very entrance of foreign policy into her thinking totally obscured individualism.

Of course her followers, especially recently, have taken this-- not all her followers, but many of them, many of the most vocal ones-- have taken this to a whole new level. Right after 9/11 there were calls for us, for we, us, we were attacked by them, and we need to attack them back; not just the hijackers, not even just the places that the hijackers came from, or the organizations in which they were members, but the entire Arab world, much of the Muslim world. Some called for nuking nine or ten countries. And of

course if the U.S. actually did this, depending on how it came about, this could be the worst thing that ever happened in terms of individuals being killed. So there's something wrong here.

Now of course belligerent nationalism, it doesn't just afflict the worst of the Randians, and it's been a problem for a long time. I would submit that belligerent nationalism has the capacity to produce the same human misery, on the same scale, as Communism. And if you look at much of history, it's countries fighting each other over nothing, over a few feet of territory that no one even wants to live there, and it's all about the nation-state. Even Communism took root in a lot of places that it probably would not have if it weren't for nationalist impulses. They had to play on that. It was supposed to be this internationalist philosophy, but it resulted in kind of a modern tribalism. It relied on it in order to really take root.

Of course belligerent nationalism, we've seen it totally corrupt most of the Right. The Conservative Movement, certainly the Republican establishment, the Christian Right, has largely forgotten about the essential dignity of the individual that their faith upholds, and that's been so important to their tradition. And incidentally, many of them also seem to, in their calls for the empire to torture people, they seem to forget their Savior was tortured to death by an empire. But I guess-- I'm sure Lawrence will talk about this more, so I won't bash them any more than that. But even the doves, even especially on the Left, when they condemn the war, they do so largely from collectivist premises-- this is a national tragedy, our national priorities have been pushed aside, the international community doesn't respect the U.S. Empire anymore; which incidentally I think is probably the best thing that's happened from this war.

And some of the Left will criticize the fact that people profit off the war which, of course, it's important to follow the money, I really believe that-- but they'll criticize that more than the war itself. It's like they don't like the privatization of the war, but if it were a totally socialist war supposedly it'd be better. Of course it would be less sustainable because the state does rely on a sector of capitalism to feed itself. So one of the silver linings of a totally socialist state is it's harder to kill people abroad; but it's not exactly what I want.

So but what is really at stake here, when we're talking about war and empire? Well, what we're talking about is really the total negation of the individual. We're talking about a total assault on individual rights and dignity. And seeing as though many of us do believe that it's from individual rights and dignity that civilization grows, what's at stake is civilization itself, and therefore what's at stake is the greater good. To understand why the empire really does hurt the greater good, as most decent people would try to assess it, it is important to look at how it affects the individual. Let me begin with the beleaguered taxpayer.

Now each American is being soaked for thousands of dollars for this empire. And some would say it's almost trivial to mention this; and I don't think it's the worst thing about empire, but it's very significant. And it's funny that-- I have-- actually at Berkeley, I actually know some people on the Left, and they'll talk about-- when I talk about the tax side of the state, sometimes they'll say that it's trivial. And yet the same people will complain about the national priorities being pushed aside by war. It's okay to say that with this money we could have Medicare 3 and Social Security 2 and build more public schools, but for some reason it's not okay to reflect on what would've happened if that money wasn't seized at all.

Think about what all of these taxpayers could have done. They could've invested in businesses, they could've saved, they could've spent more time with their families, they could've maybe moved somewhere, they could've gone on vacation, they could've retired earlier. They could've done 100 things that would help bolster civil society, and at worst they probably wouldn't have been much of a menace to civil society. And, of course, on average everything they would've done would've been far better in promoting any sense of the greater good that I would care to promote.

Of course, much of this taxation isn't direct. As Lew pointed out yesterday, or not just pointed out but explained in some detail, a lot of this tax money that's seized is done so indirectly through the Central Bank and inflation and higher prices, and all of this benefits the corporate state and the fat cats who are connected to the military industrial complex, and it hurts the average person. And this is also very bad for the greater good, as is the business cycle, which inflation will bring on eventually in a malinvestment, terrible things in the economy. And of course the economy, the free economy in general, is under threat because of the war.

I'd like to point out that even if we were to take the Great Society and the Progressive Era and the New Deal and all of these terrible things and erased them from history-- and I don't think I underestimate how terrible some of these episodes were-- our government would still be huge. Because the Warfare State-- it was the wars that really brought on much of the control over the economy coming from Washington. It was the Warfare State that created the institutions that later became resuscitated for the purpose of the New Deal, as Bob Higgs's work shows in great detail, and incidentally it was also the war that brought the precedents for such things as Prohibition. And if you really look at it, almost everything that we hate can be traced in one way or another to war.

But the economy, as this abstraction that people talk about, is not really what we're talking about; what we're talking about is the individual. During war the individual's liberty is pushed aside. In the market this means we sometimes get price controls, we get command control of markets, we get socialization of the private sector, or corporatization, or kind of corporate socialization, whatever you

want to call it, and we get all sorts of violations of civil liberties, as we're all aware. Those seen as enemies of the collective, or insufficient supporters of the war collective, are often targeted, they're smeared, their lives are ruined. They've sometimes been jailed in our history. As it is, they have trouble getting airline flights, as we know. This is a terrible thing.

Now as it affects the so-called personal liberties-- and for me it's a little difficult to even break things into economic and personal liberty. I see liberty as a unified whole, but I understand the conceptual bifurcations. So for these purposes let's talk about the personal liberties. Well, hundreds of years ago, in Medieval England, a practice, a legal procedure called habeas corpus, was born. Now interestingly, habeas was not born as this great individualist principle. There was this individualist principle against unjust [detention] in the Magna Carta and in many other legal theories, but it wasn't habeas corpus's role in the beginning to secure liberty exactly. It was more of a jurisdictional power play where some courts would use it to bring forth prisoners of other courts, largely to collect court fees. It was very cynical at first, as many of our traditions are, but eventually what grew out of the king's own courts was turned against the king by parliament. And in America this principle became even more individualist, in the colonies, as they demanded habeas corpus as a way to guarantee the rights of the individual.

And this is important and vital in every way: the idea that you can't just stick someone in a cage, without some reason or something approaching a reason; the idea that unjust imprisonment is very wrong. We all hear about crimes against the state, society, crimes against other private individuals. I wouldn't lump these all together, but this is something most people think about and find very important.

But what about the crime of the state putting someone in a cage that shouldn't be in a cage? For the individual, this is totalitarianism; for the individual involved this is a great evil. I would paraphrase Augustine and say that a greater good that relies on unjust imprisonment is no greater good at all. So recently though we've seen this principle turned on its head once again; it's now the executive's prerogative once again. Alberto Gonzales says there's no right to habeas corpus in the Constitution and so forth. And it's very brazen that they would take this position so openly, and it's unfortunate there's not much, much more outrage.

Of course, if we really want to understand the dignity of the individual being totally cast aside in these detentions, it's very important to confront earnestly the torture state. Torture. I grew up, not that long ago, thinking that torture was kind of the very embodiment of evil. You don't torture people. You got someone detained and you're going to destroy their mind and do all sorts of cruel savage things to their body-- to borrow Ayn Rand's term **savage**. But seriously, this is a disgusting practice, and it's become a talking point of course. In the Republican debates you get applause in proportion to how much you praise

and promote torture. This is a terrible development in our culture. It's very corrupting in every way. And incidentally, as far as the greater good is concerned, some of the most important pre-Iraq War intelligence, if we want to call it that, that was cited by Colin Powell, that helped push many people over the edge to supporting a war, it came from torture.

So what greater good could offset a war that's so bad that almost even half the Republicans now are distancing themselves from it? This is a very unpopular war now, it's obviously not to anyone's greater good, and it came from torture. This very idea of weighing national security against individual liberty, this is an egregious error because there's no security if the state can round you up, throw you in a cage, torture you, force you to fight; the idea you're fighting for freedom by totally surrendering it seems to be in vogue these days. But it's a totally mistaken idea, this, that we need to balance civil liberties. We need to do no such thing. But as bad as all of this is, including torture, where war and empire really attack the individual is in the war itself.

First of all, we've got what they call nation building, but it's really nation wrecking or whatnot, but the idea that the U.S. can create nations abroad and create free institutions and build public works. It seems like if conservatives really believe this, why would they oppose the government doing this at home, if it could do it abroad? So on an economics level, individualism is thrown aside in war. But ethically, what is war? What's bombing? This is somewhat controversial, even in anti-war circles. But bombing strikes me as among the most barbaric practices in modern life. These are human beings. When you drop a bomb-- not you, sorry-- when someone drops a bomb on a neighborhood, it kills people, it kills innocent people, it kills children, and these are all human beings. They all have individual rights and dignity, and many of them are totally innocent of any crime against the person dropping the bomb or the state dropping the bomb.

In the twentieth century, a century whose story is largely one of modernist mass murder, competing forms of collectivism, death camps, and gulags, there's one institution that I think is still neglected. There's one trend that is still ignored. The U.S. emerged in the twentieth century as the most bomb-happy regime ever. Think of all of the people the U.S. bombed in the last hundred years. In World War II something like over 60 cities in Japan destroyed. In Germany it was more than 100. In Korea Truman pinpointed, he targeted civilian dams purposely to kill a million or more Koreans through drownings and floods. He dropped thousands of pounds of ordinance; millions of gallons of napalm, in what is truly the forgotten war. And in Vietnam of course we know the estimates of how many people were killed by the bombing ranges, but it's somewhere likely one, two, three million. It's really tragic to have to say that the rate of death is somewhere between one and three million.

But at any rate, does it occur to people that this is about as many innocent people as Pol Pot killed? This is a very significant thing. And at least intellectually, on the Left and on the Right, there's this understanding, there's this learning that we had from the twentieth century. We've learned a lot of lessons about totalitarianism, about Nazism, Fascism, Communism, but what about bombing, what about strategic bombing? The whole thing really has to be rethought, because it seems to me to be qualitatively on the same scale of totally dismissing the individual's rights for the collective good. And people defend it. They'll either say, "Well that did bring about a greater good," just as some people still defend Lenin and even Mao. Or on the other hand they'll say, "Well that was a mistake, we shouldn't have done that. We made a mistake."

Well thankfully, I think there has been some improvement in this area. It's true that right after 9/11 there were calls from some of the people I mentioned, and some conservatives, for massive strategic bombing. And just a few years ago conservatives who didn't want to admit the fundamental folly of the Iraq War said we need to get out and just nuke the Sunni Triangle. So this horrible immorality still persists, but I don't think that people would be as open, Americans would be as open to strategic bombing, in the World War II sense, as they were then; or not that they were all totally aware, but I think there's been some progress, and for this we should be completely grateful.

But this underlying premise that it's okay to kill foreigners, it persists. It's accepted that you can just drop bombs on people. In the '90s we've heard about the sanctions from a few people: 500,000, 300,000, 1,000,000. But you kill one child in our culture, it's pretty darn unforgivable, or two children or three children. You shouldn't have to go into hundreds of thousands for this to be seen as a crime. And they say the sanctions didn't work, but they worked all too well at all that sanctions are good for and all that their purpose really could have been, which is killing people and making life miserable. Shock and Awe made me really sick to my stomach. When I saw the footage of these bombings and people cheering this on, it really disgusted me. Probably I think that the best thing that Michael Moore has ever done is his 9/11 movie, his *Fahrenheit 9/11* movie, the footage-- when he wasn't talking, when he was off camera and when he just showed the footage of Baghdad before the bombing; and the conservatives, they hated this.

Which is ironic because they're all saying, "You're ignoring all the good stuff happening in Iraq." We've all heard that. What about the good things happening in Iraq before Shock and Awe? What about the good things that happened in Iraq to people who are dead now? And they did have civil culture. They had even a degree of liberalism in Baghdad. Most important, they had people there. They had people with families and lives, people with jobs and dreams, people with faith, their favorite music, their favorite art, their favorite foods, people who got up every day, just like we get up every day. And they're gone, just like the Germans and the Japanese and the Koreans and the Vietnamese and the Cambodians and all of the

people in the lesser wars killed by the U.S. Empire; they were slaughtered, and they were individual people.

Now if it's okay to bomb people because their government's evil, well, as a radical I would say that would mean it'd be okay to bomb everybody, because of course I see every government as evil. But if it's okay to bomb people because their particular government is particularly evil, by this mentality you can defend 9/11. Certainly the U.S. Government was aggressive in the Middle East. Certainly the U.S. Government did more to disturb the lives of innocent people than terrorists did, just in body count terms, ever did to Americans. And yet we all know that the 9/11 attacks were evil, because despite what their government did, even despite what they might have been thinking on some level, some of them, those Americans had a right to life too, and those Americans were murdered.

But it's the same thing. Rights are universal. If you're going to defend Shock and Awe-- which of course Iraq, unlike the U.S., wasn't even involved in-- but as a noncollectivist I see that as almost a secondary point-- but if you're going to defend dropping bombs on people, and you're going to be consistent, you're going to have to defend terrorism.

This brings us to an important concept, *collateral damage*. Now the idea is we don't mean to kill these people. We meant to kill this person; and often, by the way, this person's not even killed. But putting that aside, this person's bad, that's our target. These other people just happened to be there. But if you know that they're there and you drop the bomb anyway, if the state drops the bomb anyway, it's deliberate homicide. You know what you're doing, right? So you could say it's not the target. But this of course isn't the way it works in self-defense; we believe in the right to self-defense. But if someone beats you up, even if someone hurts your family, even if someone kills your loved ones, you can't just kill their whole family, you can't just bomb their neighborhood. You can't force yourself on anybody except the aggressor. And indeed the right to self-defense, some libertarians, I think, have a blind spot here. The right to self-defense is like all other rights, it's constrained by property rights and the rights of other people. Being attacked is not a license to violate other people's rights, any more than being hungry or being in another emergency situation.

Now they say, there's some theorists-- and I'm reluctant to talk about this because it's kind of an esoteric theory, but it has some importance and it creeps up-- they'll defend a lot of this on the human shield analogy. They'll say, "If someone's about to shoot you and they have a hostage and you have no choice, you have a right to shoot the hostage too." Well, first of all, what they say--well, they say that you have a right, because otherwise we'd be overtaken by armies with tanks with babies strapped to them-- I've seen this argument multiple times, otherwise I wouldn't waste your time with this-- but we'd be overtaken

by people with human shields and then our ethics would-- First of all, it seems strange that they say our ethical individualism is unrealistic, because in the real world we'd be overtaken by tanks with babies strapped to them. That's kind of funny in itself in a-- not in a ha-ha way.

But I think that a lot of this misses the point. Personally, I think it's still immoral to shoot the human shield, but if you're in a crazy Hobbesian world where you-- people are mammals on some level. We will violate our own principles if we're forced to survive; many of us will, it's hard to resist it. But first of all that doesn't mean that it's right, and second of all you can't really apply this to the warfare state. An individual has to deal with other individuals. They're held accountable by their victims, by the victim's heirs, by public opinion. And so if you end up violating someone's rights in a horrifying lifeblood situation where it's really your life or someone else's rights, people tend to be more forgiving, they tend to be more understanding, and you know that you have to reckon with that. But the state's not like that. To the extent that the state grows and it's successful as a state, it's lawless. It doesn't have accountability, and public opinion is by definition in its favor.

So to apply individual emergency ethics to the warfare state, this is all meant to obscure mass murder. We're not talking about the odd case where someone incidentally or accidentally hurts someone innocent, when they're trying to preserve their life. This happens, but not very often. This isn't what we're talking about when planes are flying way up in the air, dropping bombs on neighborhoods. There's no relation or reality at all. And of course if we want to avoid this Hobbesian world where people are so desperate that they do violate their own moral principles, and I'll admit-- I think these moral principles are important, but I do think that people, when pushed, will make compromises; most people, maybe not everybody, but I think many people would.

If we want to avoid these situations the best way is to stay the hell out of war. War is the number one area where people's, where I don't believe rights conflict, but it's the only area where people actually are put in situations, where American servicemen are put in situations where they're in the aggressor nation but they want to survive under this. This isn't the way, this isn't the society we want to envision. We don't want a world where everybody is always taking hostages and there's people blowing each other up and there's chaos. It seems to be the opposite of what we favor.

Now this is interesting because in a sense the individual's ethic is also the most respectable and realistic when it comes to approaching even the soldier in an aggressive-- for an aggressive state. It is difficult to assess the actual moral status of an American serviceman, for example, because the state-- well, most important, the state forces the person to be here. They're there. The military is the one institution where if you get an employment contract with them you can't quit, and they can't just-- it's not just that

they can sue you for damages, they can force you to work for them-- force you to kill, force you to die under pain of death. And this is an indentured servitude, this is something that we don't really accept, for the most part, in the private sector. And without that freedom, without the freedom of the individual soldier to quit his job, which I consider is an important right, it's difficult to know how much we should respect even their willingness to sacrifice, or how much or how many of them would actually stay there at all.

So I think this is an important issue, the right-- stop loss is terrible; of course the conscription is pure evil. But forcing someone to stay in war when they don't want to I think is evil too. And it's true, as an individualist we have to look at what they're doing on the ground. Not every soldier is an aggressor, any more than every soldier is a hero. Some of them actually don't commit aggression. Some of them might on occasion protect someone's rights; it happens. Of course on balance when a state invades another country there's not much of that. But if we really, if we do want to support the troops as individuals, we have to restore individual responsibility for their actions and individual liberty for them to quit.

Now this whole idea that from empire comes liberation strikes me as very similar to the socialism that tempted the liberals off course. Liberalism used to be about the common person being elevated against the throne and altar or the ancien regime, and the interests of the individual worker and the free market were seen as all kind of tied together, until socialism promised liberal ends through stateist means. But the warfare state's exactly the same. It promises liberal ends, liberation, through killing and torture and taxation. And conservatives point out—well, the half-decent ones-- that it's hard to say the welfare state's compassionate when people are forced to fund it. But it's the same thing with a warfare state. Liberation coming out of bombs and razor wire and curfews and martial law; this has to be just absurd on its face.

Unfortunately, a lot of individuals, or people who see themselves that way, have come to see the nation-state of America as the great individualist collective, if you will. It represents individualism. It is the march of individualism worldwide, the crusade for individualism. The other people-- and they're always demonizing the other-- the others, they don't believe in individualism. They don't really have rights until our collective grants them to them. It's kind of the mentality, it's not much of a caricature at all. But really imperialism is, it's an evil in the way that Communism and Totalitarianism and Fascism are evils. It's an evil in that it has slaughtered millions of people and it brings about devastation in social life and corruption of the culture. And Communism has failed, and this is one of the great triumphs of our lifetimes, to see the end of Stalinism and Communism.

But it failed for a couple of reasons, and one was ideological-- one was people just didn't want to put up with it-- and the other was economic. Unlike what the Reagan Republicans thought, Communism doesn't work, so it was bound to collapse. But the economic pressure that eventually brings collectivism to its knees, that eventually forces the laws of gravity to bring the warfare state, the empire-- because all empires fail, just like all Communist states will fail-- it's kind of a slow process at times. What we have to do is stress the ideological side. We can't change the laws of economics, but we could change public opinion, even if one, two, ten, 100 people at a time. And this is very-- this is extremely crucial, because it also will determine what replaces empire.

If the Russians and the Eastern Europeans were total libertarians, Communism would've given way to something even much, much comparably better than it has. I don't want to see the empire crumble with Americans and their lives and their dollars underneath, and I don't want to see people-- I don't want to see it end in a very tragic and painful way. But if we want to not just hasten the end but make it as soft a fall as possible, if we want to make sure that it never returns again, I think we need to champion individualism, ethical individualism, not just for ourselves but for all individuals, the taxpayer, the torture victim, the victim of spying, and certainly the victim of bombing, with as much courage and as much determination as we would argue against totalitarianism. And I think not only is individualism the best indictment of the warfare state and imperialism and all these things that we hate, but it's the one that-- it's the only one that can guarantee that when the empire dies, it will never come back. Thank you.

Man 2: Hello. I really appreciated that speech, and I just wanted to-- I think it's very interesting how the media, and again the war mongering groups, want to keep certain ideas at bay. And I think one of them is-- I think we had something where we declared independence, didn't we, and had this idea of self-determination?

Anthony Gregory: Oh yes, yes.

Man 2: At some point, I know, in the distant past. But we never hear in discourse, certainly on the media, the question or the discussion of what about the peoples and the groups where we're going and bombing, don't they have-- what do the Iraqis want? You can tell-- well obviously we have self-determination for our buds because we let the terrorists sit in the tribal regions of Afghanistan because the military dictator there was CIA. So he's our bud. But we bomb. The surge is trying to kill Sadr in Iraq because-- and he's probably a theocrat, he's not necessarily a good guy, but he says Iraq has self-determination, and I want the Iraqi people to do that, and the Americans to go. So it's selective, but also it's-- the word in the discussion is completely avoided. I wonder if you noticed that too.

Anthony Gregory: Well one important-- that's a very important point. In fact, the American Revolution was a revolution against a hypocritical empire, one that claimed to stand for liberty, and to a large extent in the context of the world did, internally, but treated its colonial and imperial subjects not with liberty. I would argue honestly, and I'm not trying to bash the colonists, I'd argue that King George wasn't quite as bad as George Bush in terms of what he did; at least in this context. Now, and another interesting point, is conservatives, Randians, a lot of people who say, people have a right not to be taxed for welfare, but national defense, which means of course 150 countries with American bases and everything. The interesting thing is what kind of taxes were the American colonists revolting against? Social security taxes, Medicare taxes? No, they were revolting against empire taxes-- and they were relatively low by our standards-- but they were revolting against an empire that was being pitched to them as being in their common good. And it's astounding to see when Bush stands up there in these 4th of July celebrations. That's all I have to say, I just-- I'm just speechless that-- you know. No, the Iraqis, and in fact every country in which the U.S. military has standing armies, including our own, I think, could use another round of declarations of independence.

Man 3: Would you talk about the idea of a just war, and are there any circumstances under which you would think that the state would have a collective right to self-defense?

Anthony Gregory: I don't think states have any rights. At the very best the state lives at the privilege of the people; at the very best. And again, at the very best, the battery of founding fathers saw it as a necessary evil; it's always evil, it has no rights. Of course I think that if people are invaded they have a right to resist tyranny and they have a right to resist invasion. But the Just War Theory, which is of course light years away from virtually any American war, is-- and I'm sure that Lawrence will talk about this too, I hope-- but to some extent I think the Just War Theory is actually not good enough; it's infinitely better than what we have. But there's a great journal article in the Independent Institute's journal, the *Independent Review*, edited by Bob Higgs, this article by Laurie Calhoun called "Just War, Moral Soldiers," that argues the very concept of a just war has done more to encourage unjust wars than anything. And I believe that she has a book coming out about this.

Man 3: What was the name, what was her name?

Anthony Gregory: Laurie Calhoun. Now it's true that when one state aggresses against another country, there's often-- I'm an individualist, and I explained what I think that means. So I think that within the country people can be defending themselves. But that includes against their own state. So if the state's coming around to draft you, you have as much right to consider him an occupier as you do a

foreign state. I consider foreign invasions overall worse, but I don't think that-- would I believe in a just war if I saw one? I suppose. I'd also-- yeah.

Man 3: I'm asking about them as a theoretical entity then.

Anthony Gregory: Yeah, if there's-- the extent to which there's aggression against peaceful people, it's unjust. So I don't think any war has been completely just. Even the American Revolution, some of these colonists, their own real goal was to conquer Canada. We're not supposed to talk about this, but that was by far the most defensible war in our history, but it was also kind of one of the first imperial wars too. But I try to look at it as individuals. So when the Confederacy was resisting the Union, I don't think the Confederacy was just in anything it did. But individuals defending their homes against anybody, that's just, and so the extent to which the defense effort resembles that, that's the extent to which it's just. But just war I think is really an oxymoron because it's almost not even a war, the extent to which it's just. So I'm not a big fan of war. But again, the more just the better, right?

Man 4: Like most writers, libertarian writers who are anti-war, for obvious reasons for the past seven years, your talk spent most of its time focusing on the neoconservative or rightwing or Conservative justifications and the anti-libertarian arguments for the warfare state. But don't you think there's an equal danger from the Left with their philosophies of humanitarian intervention, the Save Darfur movement? A soldier dead in Darfur is just as dead as a soldier dead in Iraq.

Anthony Gregory: Or a foreigner there.

Man 4: Yes, and the fact that we had calls from the Left for military interventions to deliver supplies to the earthquake in Burma because their horrible government refused to even allow humanitarian volunteers to come in—

Woman 1: Cyclone.

Man 4: For a cyclone, sorry, thank you. And would you entertain the thought that, perhaps, because of this humanitarian, leftwing, feel-good interventionism, that still predominates on the Left, that an Obama foreign policy might actually be worse than a McCain policy?

Anthony Gregory: Well, the Democrats can always be worse. They were worse throughout the twentieth century. And I didn't mean to imply that I would concede an inch to a Wilsonian mindset. I think it's evil, and I think that the humanitarian with the atom bomb is not much of a moral paragon. But

I think that if you scratch this internationalist thrust on the Left, you'll still find nationalism. It was the Democrats who talked about the "one indispensable nation," and they're still unilateral. I think that at least in much of-- right now, or at least for the last several years, those who call themselves on the Right have been worse than those who call themselves on the Left. But really the issue is, do you want to murder people or not? And I don't think that you have a right to tax and murder people for so-called good and humanitarianism; which of course was one of the elements of the-- last year, I gave a talk where I more extensively addressed the internationalist liberal justification, rationales for war. So I agree, we should never-- Obama can be worse, of course.

Man 1: Anthony, we have time for one more question.

Man 5: What role and influence has Social Darwinism and the survival of the fittest had on the way the U.S. has gone to war?

Anthony Gregory: Well, I think largely it's been-- it's encouraged it. It depends, if you really look at-- I think to a large extent Social Darwinism and Spencer's views have been taken out of context by some of his collectivist critics. But on the other hand, this is why I think egoist individualism has its limits in actually defending liberty and individual rights and dignity. So people saw the destiny of the U.S. both as a secular force and as a religious force, 100 years ago, and so it was always-- it's bad. So I think that it was in many ways very bad.

Man 1: Thank you.