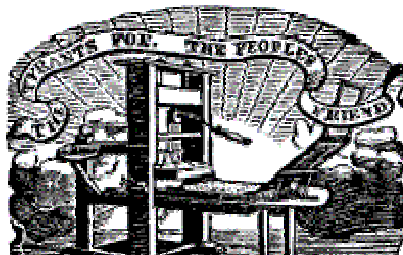


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**Editorial:
On Time's Winged Chariot
Sean Gabb**

About 18 months ago, Mrs Gabb noticed a lump on my chest - a hard projection from my sternum - that was visible when I breathed in, and that hurt when pressed. I was filled with alarm for a while,

but then decided to ignore the thing. I had lost some weight. Perhaps this was a normal part of my skeleton that I had previously overlooked. Two months ago, having moved house, I went for a medical examination at my new general practitioner. The nurse who examined me pulled a face, and said she did not know what the lump was. She urged me to make an appointment to see a doctor.

I immediately decided it was bone cancer and that I was dying - this despite being in otherwise excellent health, and despite my not showing any of the more general symptoms of bone cancer. I revised my will, and prepared to face death with a stiff upper lip, if with a rather queasy stomach.

A few days ago, I had back the result of the hospital tests. The lump was indeed a normal part of me. It seems that I shall be around for the foreseeable future. I am told that people who believe they are dying and then learn they are not often take greater pleasure in being alive. They find the impressions of their senses to be more vivid, and appreciate more the common things of life. For myself, I can only report a certain complacency tinged with relief. I am not, so far as anyone can tell, dying at the moment, and that is it.

This being said, I have now reached an age that would once have been regarded as advanced; and while vitamin pills and reasonably clean living can be expected to keep me in this world for some time yet, there will inevitably come an encounter with the doctors from which I shall not emerge so well. When this will happens I cannot say. But it will surely come. And so I have decided to dwell in this editorial on the awful fact of mortality.

It would be nice to believe that I shall at the latter day stand before One who will judge me for my conduct in this life. Apart from the usual pride, gluttony, sloth, envy, lust, and so forth, I do not think, according to my own theological views, that I have committed any unpardonable sins. I see no reason why I should not be allowed to pass into a future life of everlasting bliss. I see no reason, that is, except I am not usually able to believe that it will happen. I suspect that nothing exists but matter in various kinds of motion, and that the atoms of the soul are dispersed at death with those of the body. This need not be cause for despair. If there is nothing after death, there is no reason to fear death. It is but a long and untroubled sleep. Just as I felt nothing before I was born, when Britain and Germany went to war, and shook the world with the power of their armaments, and put all mankind in doubt of which would be the victor, so when I am dead, nothing then can disturb me - not even if the earth is cast into the sea and the sea is merged with the sky.

On the other hand, though I am impressed by Lucretius, I am not satisfied. I do not accept any of the rational arguments put forward to justify the existence of God and an afterlife: they are all formally defective. Neither, though, do I wholly reject the proposition. Even if I do not believe, I can hope.

But, whatever may happen to us after we are dead, it seems undeniable that we are here only once in our known personalities. It therefore seems reasonable to pay some attention to the use we make of our time. When the news of my reprieve loses its ability to please me - as it surely will in the next few days - I shall find myself invaded again by the usual doubts; and I may find the force of these magnified in proportion to my present relief. Have I really achieved anything of which to be proud in my life to date? Am I on a course that will let me achieve anything in the future? Is my writing for the Internet a waste of time? Should I not be working more actively on my demographic history of the Roman Empire? Should I not at least be gathering materials for my study of the economics of ancient slavery? How about the project, conceived in 1987 and ignored since, to analyse the impact of sexually transmitted diseases on the change of sexual attitudes after the third century? And how about the work, actually begun last year, on the best modern sounding of the Greek accents? I am full of bright ideas for research. I know the ancient languages well enough. I

can write well enough. I could without punishing effort achieve recognition as a good classical scholar. Instead, I am writing weekly philippics against Tony Blair.

Of course, Mr Blair is an evil man, and I believe I have a duty to do what little I can to assist in his political destruction. He is a liar and a traitor and a bloodthirsty psychopath. If there is a Hell, he deserves to go there for at least a very long time. But "Nothing too much" is a fine motto. If then the flow of writing for the Internet is diminished over the next few months, my dear Readers, do not be disappointed. At the same time, though, do not be relieved.

Class Warfare And Nationalism
by Kevin A. Carson <kevin_carson@hotmail.com>

To hear some people talk, the greatest sin one can commit is "class warfare." Bob Novak denounces the "Marxist class war" of those who, unhelpfully, point out that government policies benefit one class at the expense of another (the guilty class warriors, it seems, being those who acknowledge the phenomenon rather than those who engage in it). Former Treasury Secretary O'Neil expressed his outraged sensibilities over "robber baron rhetoric." This class warfare is evil, they say, because it pits American against American--the worst form of filial impiety.

Just out of curiosity, what is so holy about the idea of "nation" or "country" as a form of common bond, as opposed to common class status, religion, or for that matter, race? What is it about the "mystic bonds" of union between those born in the same territory that makes the deaths of seven countrymen in a shuttle explosion more tragic than the deaths of, say, a thousand civilians in Iraq? As I recall, the Declaration of Independence proclaimed "all men" equal, not "all Americans." How is the elevation of one nationality to a preferred level of humanity, and the degradation of others to near-irrelevance (except when they are murdered by official enemies of the American State, that is, and thus useful in generating war fever), any different from the ante bellum Southern claim that blacks weren't really part of the "all men" referred to in the Declaration?

And why is it so obviously silly to address another (according to Wobbly custom) as "fellow worker," but entirely "dulce et decorum" to hail an audience as "my fellow Americans"? It would seem to make at least as much sense to identify with others based on common status as producers, as on the basis of being born in the same geographical area.

I can understand the instinct of patriotism when it is tied to local affections, and associated with family and community. A healthy patriotism is suffused with filial piety toward hearth and home and toward the graves of one's ancestors, and with common folkways. But this instinctive patriotism is precisely what the neoconservative ideologues of "national greatness" repudiate. American patriotism, they say, is not to be identified with all these homely local affections, but with an American "idea" as broad and airy as Ingsoc. It is allegiance to a grand Straussian abstraction, to a "Liberty" that has nothing to do with the right to be left alone by the State, and everything to do with a global Empire's war for a false liberty (one and the same with the "benevolent global hegemony" over which they enthuse). Their "Liberty," tautologically, is established by the State's values and goals: by definition, in their ideology, every foreign war fought by the American National Security State is for "our freedom." Alan Keyes, so far as I know, is the most egregious example of this phenomenon. Almost a parody of Straussianism, he has turned the abstract "Liberty" of the Declaration's second paragraph into a civil religion; but when it comes to concrete liberty, he hints darkly at prosecuting Ted Rall for "poisoning the mind of the sovereign," and thus undermining the popular resolve in the perpetual war for (ahem) Liberty.

Perhaps we'll be told by Rumsfeld that the local patriotism of Lexington and Concord, Captain Shays and the Gadsden Flag, is the "old Americanism." That atavism, no doubt, has since been supplanted by the "new Americanism" of believing "our leaders'" propaganda, projecting an air of relentless optimism in the outcome of our perpetual war, and generally sitting down, shutting up, and doing what we're told--all in the name, of course, of "defending our liberties."

There is a growing subcurrent in libertarianism, known by various names including "neoliberalism" and "anti-idiotarian" (I prefer the term Shiite libertarian) that has adopted the neocon understanding of "Americanism." Their websites are full of links to denunciations of "fifth columnists" by such renowned libertarians as David Horowitz and Ann Coulter. I read a post by one warblogger who followed his use of the epithet "anti-American" with the contemptuous "Pardon me. He opposes American foreign policy. Whatever."

So the distinction between a nation and the policies of the state that rules it is a relic of "old libertarianism." The old libertarians made a distinction between the nation as a host organism, and the glorified tapeworms in Washington who infested its colon; the new libertarians are foursquare for the tapeworms. Those archaic libertarians who actually distrust the government are "tin foil hat" lunatics and "conspiracy theorists"; those who refuse to take the state's self-justifications at face value, or to accept the pretexts for its wars (as opposed to the "new libertarians" who endlessly cheerlead the state's wars for the expansion of "liberty"), are relegated to the ashheap of history.

Let's pose a hypothetical problem for those who so vehemently denounce "class warfare" for dividing Americans against one another. Imagine being held up at gunpoint by a mugger. Does it bother you less when you find out he's an American citizen? Does the knowledge that he was born between the 49th parallel and the Rio Grande suffice to absolve him of the crime of robbing you? Do you say, "Oh, well, since you're one of my American lodge brothers, we'll just let bygones be bygones?"

Well, from my free market anarchist viewpoint, that is exactly what the state capitalist elites in the United States are doing. They are using the coercive power of the State to rob the producing classes at gunpoint, in order to live off their labour.

When the state capitalist ruling class secures banking legislation that lets the owners of capital exact more in usury than they would receive in a free credit market, and thus restricts the working class' access to credit, subjects them to debt slavery as a form of labor discipline, and forces them to sell their labour in a buyer's market, that is robbery, just as much as a mugger poking a gun in someone's ribs. When giant manufacturers use patent monopolies to cartelise markets, controlling productive technology between themselves, that is robbery. When the state subsidizes transportation, and thus allows global corporations to externalize their distribution costs on the taxpayer, that is robbery. And when big business, as Murray Rothbard put it, relies on "our corporate state... to accumulate corporate capital or to lower corporate costs," that is nothing but robbery.

Classical liberalism was founded on class warfare. It was a movement of the producing classes against the legacies of mercantilism and feudalism, and was motivated by resentment against the privilege of statist monopolies and quasi-feudal landlords. The legacy of this petty bourgeois radicalism can be found in Nockian and Geoist nooks and crannies of the free market movement, and among Rothbardians who criticize state capitalism wherever it is found. There are even a few followers of Warren and Tucker holding out, myself proudly among them. In contrast, the "libertarians" who identify the "free market" with statist parasites like Bill Gates and who defend the state capitalist corporation, are direct descendants of the ruling class apologists Adam Smith denounced.

If this be class war, then make the most of it.

**Why Criticising American Foreign Policy
is not Anti-Americanism
by Sean Gabb
(First Published as *Free Life Commentary*,
issue 102, 28th April 2003)**

I have in the past few weeks been roundly abused by many of my readers for an alleged hostility to the United States. About a thousand have even unsubscribed from my mailing list - though I have acquired almost as many new readers as lost. I regret this. On the one hand, I write - like everyone else who does so not in hope of payment - for my own amusement: I am curious to know what I think on certain issues, and how well I can express myself; and I am happy if others want to overhear this conversation. On the other hand, I do like to be overheard. It is gratifying to know that, without the advantages of being published in *The Spectator* or in some other established journal, I can still be reasonably famous and reasonably influential. I do not suppose that I shall bring back my lost readers by writing this article. But I do hope that the ten or eleven thousand who remain will appreciate a clarification of my views on the United States.

There is no doubt that the United States is home to the greatest civilisation the world has ever seen. Except in film, and then largely now in the past, this is not a civilisation great in high cultural achievement. Where not actually barbarous, its music is a small and dispensable appendage to the great German tradition. It has completed the British task of extending the English language over the whole world; but its own native literature has been similarly of little importance. It has even degraded the language with unwise neologisms and a confusion of grammar. In painting and sculpture and in architecture, it has also been undistinguished.

Nevertheless, high culture is not the only achievement of a civilisation. What the Americans have achieved is a way of life that breaks decisively with all that went before it. Every American is born into a nation that has solid protections of freedom under the law. If he is willing to work for it, he also has the means to raise himself to considerable wealth. Even if not willing to work, he can - almost as a birthright - enjoy standards of personal comfort unimaginable within living memory, and that are the envy today of almost every other nation. In science and technology and commerce - that is, in all those areas necessary for the many to enjoy the good life - America is pre-eminent. I go further. Though not distinguished as originators of high culture, the Americans have, through their inventions and manufacturing processes and general enterprise, brought the fruits of high culture within the reach of all who are able or willing to desire them.

It may be that I have entirely failed to appreciate the blessings of American popular culture, and that - should my writings survive - I shall one day join those past critics who, looking out with their preconceived notions of culture, are laughed at for their blindness to the greatness around them. But I do appreciate the American spirit. I may despise the undeveloped, sexually aggressive music, and the mindless television programmes, and the childish habits of thought and speech. But I do appreciate the spirit of the nation. I admire the achievement of those who have made a reality of Colonel Rainborough's then despairing claim, that "the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the richest he". I admire the philosophy of optimism summed up in the statement "tomorrow is another day". Anyone now alive who believes in freedom and legal equality and progress must inevitably to some degree be an American.

The problem is that American greatness has made America not just rich but also powerful. The Americans have the ability to impose their will across the world more surely than the Romans or

the British ever had before them. Their conquest of Iraq, and their ability to do so in the face of opposition from most other of the great powers, is a demonstration of their power. As I have frequently said, I do not believe that the Americans have the will to impose themselves with the same finality as other great people have in the past; and I believe that the frailty of their will to rule will bring endless grief to the world. But to the extent that they do summon the will to rule, they will undermine the foundations of their greatness.

Are the Americans greater today than before 1917 or 1898? In the military sense, they are so undoubtedly. But every step towards world domination has been at the expense of the qualities that underpin their general greatness. Their government has become more distant and opaque, more centralised and more open to capture by special interests. It has repeatedly violated the old Constitution. Liberties have been abridged on the grounds of dealing with emergencies, and then never restored. America has been at war almost throughout the whole of the past century - at war with other countries, or at war with abstractions like "drugs" or "terrorism". As everywhere else, war has been the health of the State and the sickness of the people. If the Americans today remain the freest people in the world, that is only because they started with so much more to lose.

A world without America as it was and still can be would be immeasurably the poorer. But a world with America as it seems set to become will be a nightmare. I do not in the least admire monsters like Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. They represent values that have kept ninety nine hundredths of humanity submerged in poverty and ignorance and tyranny for the past 5,000 years of recorded history. But I do understand how the projection of American military power throughout the world is driving uncountable millions to regard them as great men, and to confuse fear of American power with hatred of American values.

The war with Iraq is over. I am glad that it claimed fewer lives than it might have. But I remain convinced that it was right to oppose that war. I will oppose further American wars - at least, those in which my own country is "persuaded" to join. And I will do so not in the spirit of those intellectuals who dislike all that America represents - but in the spirit of what America truly is and ought to remain.

**Sean Gabb on American Culture:
A Comment by Tom Burroughs**

Sean, your second paragraph trashing America's contribution to music, architecture and art is magnificent in its rank snobbery! (For a moment, I thought you were being serious)

I am trying not to laugh out loud as I am at work.

Seriously though, Sean, are you really suggesting that America has produced nothing to rival Europe in, say, architecture over the past 100 years? What about Frank Lloyd Wright? Or the designers of the Manhattan skyline. (or are you just saying that anything produced after the mid-19th century doesn't count?)

Literature - how about Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Woolf, Steinbeck, Updike, Heller, Irving.....etc.

As for the rest, I agree. The Pentagon is not the U.S., and *vice versa*.

Tom

**Sean Gabb on American Culture:
A Comment by Thomas Leavitt' <thomasleavitt@hotmail.com>**

Dear Dr. Gabb,

While, as an American, I find your critique of our culture's intellectual output highly irritating (to put it mildly), I'll refrain from going into that topic in detail, as I'm sure there are vastly more worthy defenders of it than myself - I'll make an exception in an area where I am competent to defend our cultural output, by pointing out that in the genre of Science Fiction (the literature of the future) the overwhelming majority of notable authors have been American (both in its "popular" and "literary" forms).

On the central theme of your essay, I can't help but agree - but wanted to make the point that America has been through cycles of outrageous erosion of liberties, such as the original "Alien Act" and the "Sedition Act" of 1798, the suspension of *habeas corpus* during the American Civil War of 1861-1865, the "Sedition Act" of 1918, etc. and recovered our common sense shortly thereafter.

What makes today's situation so dangerous is that, unfortunately, the encroachments on our personal liberties that have been made after 9/11 are **not** dramatic departures from recent precedent - in fact, they are, in many ways, entirely logical extensions of the power our law enforcement agencies and governing bodies have been granted over the past thirty years as the result of an entirely different type of "war" - the "War on Drugs". Every blow struck against liberty, in the pursuit of punishment for drug dealers and sanctions against end users, finds its echo in, and provides justification for, the "War on Terror". It is a small step from "civil forfeiture" (seizure of property suspected of having been purchased with the proceeds from drug sales, in the absence of an actual conviction) to wholesale seizure of the assets of "charities" suspected (but not convicted of) having funded terrorism... a small step from rationalizing the use of "profiles" to justify searches of suspected drug dealers, to rationalizing the use of "profiles" to detain suspected terrorists and create "no fly" lists... a small step from rationalizing vast and detailed intrusions into people's personal finances in an identify suspicious transactions over \$10,000 that might be funded by profits from the sale of illegal drugs, to attempts such as TIA to create vast databases of small scale individual transactions in an attempt to identify suspicious behaviour that might indicate terrorist preparations.

And that is what makes the current situation so dangerous - we are not looking at a sudden deviation from established practice, but instead, mere extensions of already existing practice. Every liberty impinging and freedom impairing tactic used in the "War on Terror", has its analog and antecedent in the "War on Drugs". The stage was set for the outrageous violations of personal freedom (such as the imprisonment of Mike Hawash for over a month now, without charges, signalling the total destruction of one of our most basic protections, the writ of *habeas corpus*) we see today, by tens of thousands of small and petty erosions of our civil liberties over the past three decades, as our government gave itself greater and greater latitude to arrest and prosecute people in a desperate and futile attempt to suppress one of the most basic human impulses in existence. As, ultimately, a "War on Terror" will be futile, as long as it does not address the basic underlying motivations of the people it targets... while wreaking terrible havoc on our personal freedoms.

Regards,

Thomas Leavitt

**Sean Gabb on American Culture:
A Comment by Stan Dokupil <stan_dokupil@hotmail.com>**

No Brit has a single ounce of credibility criticizing the US for its military exploits. The Brits were at least a 1,000 times more brutal and self serving than the US has ever been or ever even tried to be. As for high culture, British "high culture" has always been by design an elitist affair which never filtered down to the British masses. The average American has far more access to "high culture" than the average Brit. And exactly who was it that foisted "sexually aggressive" pop culture and "decadent music" onto the world in the first place? Visit Paul Allen's Rock and Roll cathedral in Seattle and you will see that even though Elvis may have been first to crack the door, it was the Beatles and the Stones that opened up the floodgates.

This guy [Sean Gabb] is a shallow hypocrite who wants to have his cake and eat it too. Sounds to me like, now that the war is over and the world hasn't come to an end, he's looking for a way to continue to say I was right even though all the evidence is screaming just the opposite. Does he think Osama and Saddam would have suddenly decided to begin playing nicely if the US had politely backed down?

In my opinion, there are only two valid ways to view this current conflict: First of all, it is battle between Islam and the West - or what's left of the West. Secondly, it's a battle between the US as a sovereign nation (or what's left of the US) and the UN as a world government. Britain is setting on the fence, pulled between the one worlders of Europe and the US as currently defined by Bush and the neo-cons.

**Sean Gabb on American Culture:
A Comment by Paul Rhodes <paul@prhodes.fsworld.co.uk>**

Dear Sean,

A few comments on the US "paper".

I have worked for US companies (in the Middle East and on the Indian subcontinent) and benefited from their "can do" approach and dynamic attitude to business .They are deeply resented throughout the world but particularly in Muslim countries. They are seen to be the "Great Satan". The US model of society with its free and easy attitude to sex, pornography, booze, drugs, violence etc undermines every facet of a God fearing, conservative, traditional society.

Your comments on the dumbing down of all things by US popular culture is very accurate. Certainly in the US Boardroom and in popular culture the KISS principle is king. They have a simple model for success and cannot cope with cultural or other complications. "If it works in Texas it will work in Tehran". Popular US culture is anathema and incompatible with any culture requiring subtlety, patience, flexibility and constraint. There are exceptions of course but the values and attitudes that prevail in corporate America (and that have brought tremendous success) are replicated in Washington and for obvious reasons.

US popular culture is easy and accessible. It is seductive and therefore resented by conservative societies and those wishing to maintain their traditions and culture. Osama Binladen wished / wishes to remove the US military and US influence from Saudi Arabia. He would wish the same for all Muslim countries. How could he achieve this? Not via the ballot box (there isn't one). It's deja vu, all happened in 1978/9 in Iran.

Your comments were all valid.

Regards,

Paul Rhodes

**Sean Gabb on American Culture:
A Comment by Michael Shrimpton**

Sean,

Indeed you do misunderstand American culture!

This is with every respect a patronising view of America, the sort of thing that a European might say.

Am I not right in thinking that there are more symphony orchestras in America than Europe?

And what about America's literary heritage? Surely more to proud of there in the last century than our own?

And America's achievements in science, pure as well as applied? And what about her medical advances?

There isn't an American city in Nevada, never mind the rest of the country, without its museum, or art gallery, or concert hall.

And the plays, and the musicals? Is the tradition of Rogers and Hammerstein not as rich as that of Gilbert and Sullivan?

Broadway is surely at least as lively as the West End? I have never enjoyed the theatre so much as my visit to Broadway last time in New York. Architecture? Wasn't there a guy called Lloyd Wright who was pretty good?

What mindless TV programmes? Isn't *ER* about twice as good as *Casualty*? Who sent up the Nazis better than *Hogan's Heroes*, which is funnier than *Dad's Army*, which is pretty good?

At least America hasn't spent the last 30 years trashing her institutions the way we have, after joining the EU.

I think you vastly underestimate America and Americans, the way the EU did when they decided to sponsor 9-11. It's no surprise to me that the Americans took the Taliban and Iraq as quickly as they did, with a little bit of help from us (but not nearly as much as they were entitled to expect). America's strength is as much to do the enduring values and the patriotism of her people as it is with military might - a sick society like France or Germany would probably have crumpled under a blow like 9-11, America has simply grown stronger.

We need to greatly strengthen our friendship with America, to whom we owe a great deal, and with whom we share so much. We must start by ditching the EU, and fast, and putting in place a transatlantic free trade area, and getting behind the US on tackling Syria, Iran and North Korea.

The US actually held back on Iraq to try and accommodate Blair, who really has been a pain in the butt for them, constantly siding with the State Department, and trying to suck up to the French and Germans, just because he's the British PM.

Now unlike most countries we tend to ask what we can do for America, not what America can do for us. America saw what a true friend she had in Britain after 9-11, when she was down - but let's not be complacent. We haven't done enough to help in the war on terror, we are still in the EU, which is basically pro-terror as a weapon to wage asymmetric warfare against the US, and we need to get more firmly on side. We didn't do enough in Iraq, or Afghanistan, and our defence planning is still stuck in the pre-9-11 world, with silly little budgets that need trebling in most cases.

We have got to get rid of Blair asap, and get a serious pro-American, anti-terror, anti-EU PM in place.

I'm a bit suspicious of the expression "high culture." I tend to associate it with France, Germany and Italy, all former fascist states. They can keep it. I also think the cultural achievements of those nations lie well in the past - Germany hasn't actually produced a single composer of note, as opposed to Austria, or the German city states and principalities, with the exceptions of Brahms, Mahler and Wagner, none of whom were as great as the composers who flourished before Germany was created.

The last serious French composer was probably Debussy.

The Italians haven't had any serious composers, surely, since Verdi or Rossini.

Perhaps the American networks should screen the Eurovision song contest next time the Europeans start on about their supposed cultural superiority. I think you do seriously undervalue American popular culture, which is far from mindless, indeed much of it, like our own, is of enduring value.

All the way with the USA I say!

Have a nice day,

Michael Shrimpton

NB : and what's wrong with the Pentagon?

Libertarianism and the War
by Samuel Edward Konkin III <sek3@mac.com>

Sean,

As usual, I either agree with or appreciate your position on, just about everything. However, one sentence struck me as odd and highly out of place. "The LA takes no collective view on the rights or wrongs of any war currently likely" flies in the face of the basic libertarian opposition to all War as the Health of the State (Randolph Bourne's felicitous expression). The only "exceptions" (and it can easily be argued that they are not) are defence in the case of unprovoked aggression and, of course, revolutionary self-defence. (Nearly every major country that underwent serious revolution since France in 1789 have been invaded by surrounding countries immediately for the sole crime of inspiring seditious thoughts in those countries' hapless inhabitants.)

Nor is this an Anarchist-only position (though Rothbard, LeFevre, Hess, and just about anyone else I can think of hold it); minarchists from Leonard Read to Baldy Harper and Suzanne LaFollette held it, too. (And however you choose to classify Mencken and Nock; they've been embraced by minarchists but both have called themselves anarchists explicitly in their writings.)

You have to drag Ayn Rand (kicking and screaming) into the Libertarian fold to find any war-embracers. Could the U.K. Libertarian Alliance be **that** out-of-step (credit to Frank Chodorov)? Say it ain't so, Sean? Chris?

Freely as ever,

SEK3

**Will Tony Blair Resign
If He Turns Out to Have Lied About
The "Weapons of Mass Destruction?"
By Sean Gabb
Free Life Commentary,
issue 103, 2nd May 2003)**

Last Wednesday in Parliament, Tony Blair was asked a question by Sir Peter Tapsell, the Conservative Member for Louth and Horncastle. Here is the question:

If it eventually transpires at the time of our invasion, that Iraq no longer produced weapons of mass destruction capable of threatening this country, and the Prime Minister led this country into war under a false assumption, will he resign?

Even today, the rules of the House of Commons are strict about the use of language, and it is not permitted to accuse another Member of lying. Therefore the odd use of the words "a false assumption". But the meaning of the question was plain. Just as plainly, it was not possible for the Prime Minister to give a straight answer. Those of us who are not Members of Parliament are free from the constraints under which Sir Peter asked his question. It is now undeniable that the Prime Minister lied us into the war with Iraq.

It will not do, weeks after the end of the war, for the Allies to find a few barrels of some forbidden chemical. We were assured by Mr Blair not that the Iraqis had forbidden chemicals, or even that they were a danger to each other and their immediate neighbours, but that they had chemical and biological weapons capable of being used against this country. We were further assured that these could be deployed against us within 45 minutes. Nor will it do even if such weapons are eventually "found". That the United Nations weapons inspectors have been forbidden access to the country to continue their search for such weapons - that the man most likely to have been complicit in any hiding of them has stated in a news conference before giving himself up to the Americans that there were none - must bring any future discovery into obvious doubt. There is also the fact that the Iraqis never once used any unconventional weapons in defending their country against invasion. They had good warning that their country was about to be invaded. They had good reason to use whatever weapons they had. Failing this, they had good reason to call on the connections we were assured to exist with some international terrorist conspiracy. They did nothing. Their armies were the ill-equipped and ill-disciplined conscripts usual to the third world dump that Iraq turned out to be.

In this war, 2,500 Iraqi civilians and 10,000 Iraqi combatants are believed to have been killed. Certainly, 105 American and 32 British soldiers were killed, together with at least ten journalists.

17 million Iraqis now rely on charity for their food; and another 40,000 in Baghdad for water. The American Government so far has spent \$55 billion on fighting the war, and the British Government £3 billion. The estimated cost - to the American taxpayers largely - of rebuilding Iraq is another \$100 billion. No weapons of mass destruction - certainly none capable of use against either America or Britain - have been found. No evidence has turned up of any but the slightest communication with al Qa'eda.

It seems that the American Government always intended to invade Iraq, and was not interested in the truth of whatever claims were made to justify the invasion. That is a matter for the American people to take up with their government, not for us. But it is our concern, here in this country, that our own government lied to us.

It is not possible to say that Mr Blair was deceived by the security chiefs. Even if he had been, he appointed or retained them, and he is formally responsible for their actions. But they did not deceive him. Robin Cook, who resigned from the Government over the invasion, was a senior Minister and a former Foreign Secretary. He had no information about any Iraqi threat. Mr Blair stood up in the House of Commons and lied to Parliament and to all of us. He took us into a war that was not in our interest, that killed thousands - and might easily have killed hundreds of thousands - that has cost us billions, and that may not for many years have revealed its full cost to us. He lied us into war and thousands into early graves.

I know that some of my readers will shrug and ask "so what?" They had their own reasons for supporting the war, and regarded the talk of an immediate threat as a useful fiction. But, while I do not believe any of these reasons was enough to justify the war, I will not argue with them. All I will do is suggest that, while Mr Blair may have been useful to get us into the war, he has now served his purpose. Whatever was meant to be achieved has been achieved, or will now be achieved without his continuation in office. At the same time, every day that he continues in office is a continuation of the attack on our cultural identity as a people and therefore on our personal freedoms. We cannot even be sure that he will allow his policy on Europe to stay in ruins.

The war is over, and it is time to return to domestic issues. Mr Blair remains the most dangerous man in the country, and so it is necessary to do what we can to help remove him from office. The local authority elections went badly for him yesterday, and would certainly have gone still worse were the Conservatives not mostly in political hibernation. Even so, the more intelligent Conservatives are asking about the weapons of mass destruction. The electors are willing to hear the questions. Whatever differences I and the majority of my British readers may have had over the war, the time has come, I suggest, for all of us to join in the questions. Perhaps not even a liar so inveterate as Mr Blair may be able to answer them.

**Sean Gabb on the War:
A Rare Supporting Comment by MdV**

Dear Sean,

I seem to be in agreement with virtually everything you write. These past few months I particularly like the way you keep thinking sharp and straight while many other classical liberals light-heartedly sacrifice principles and endorse military aggression because of a basic sympathy for America and because of a muddled 'geostrategical' reasoning.

When we met in Prague in November 2001 and I delivered my lecture on the future of Europe I was convinced that the transatlantic alliance and the independent attitude of Britain was essential to

keep EU from becoming a corporatist central state. Although I was very unhappy about some developments in the USA I was confident that America's thoroughly democratic character and its tradition of freedom would time and again correct mistakes and revitalize the country. Today I am not so sure of that anymore. Since World War II there seems to be a pattern of Americans willing to sacrifice principles in the fight against scares like 'communism'; 'drugs' and 'weapons of mass destruction in the hands of dictators'. I fear that today the USA is a greater threat to freedom than the EU.

I am looking forward to your next *Free Life Commentaries*.

Best regards,

MdV

**Sean Gabb on the War:
A Comment by Kevin Bjornson <bjornsonkevin@hotmail.com>**

Dr. Gabb,

I'm surprised that you lost 1000 hawks - and that you gained an equal number of doves. This can be explained by the cognitive dissonance theory. This doesn't operate as much in my case, since I enjoy debating the unconverted.

Concerning American culture, you forgot to mention the great literature of Ayn Rand. Great movies have also been produced - e.g. *The Trojan Women*.

American military power subsidized European defence since WWII. To automatically oppose *all* American led wars would be to bite the hand that has fed you. Look to see American bases in Germany close, and new, smaller ones opened in Eastern Europe.

I have diagnosed you with a case of "Murray Rothbarditis". He went along with the late 60's movement in favour of competing agencies of the retaliatory use of force. However, he tried to apply that theory to the existing state structure, and made a great leap of error by supposing that we could move toward anarcho-capitalism by severely downsizing the US military. He went so far as to applaud the takeover of corrupt S. Vietnam by communist N. Vietnam, simply because a state had fallen. The Iraq dictatorship has fallen, but his followers are

not applauding. There is a double standard here, based on reflexive opposition to the exercise of US military power.

To make an analogy: suppose that a man rapes a black woman, and afterwards yells "nigger". Objectively, this wouldn't change the justice nature of the act. Let us look only at the nature of the act, and not who did it and why.

A fireman putting out a fire is doing a good deed, even if he is a state agent.

To automatically oppose **all** US military wars is to look at war solely through an ideological prism. This commits the Platonic fallacy, so common among academicians. We must look at the facts of each case, empirically.

What is meant by "state"? Can you prove they exist? I see only natural persons cooperating. Their actions must be judged independently of the flags they are flying.

The logic of your position leads to pacifism. If that's true, you are a "useful idiot". Political Islam can be worse than Bolshevism.

Kevin

On Ghosts and the Supernatural
By Sean Gabb
(First Published as *Free Life Commentary*,
issue 104, 2nd May 2003)

One of my readers has asked me to give up for the moment on political controversy - where I have been, during this present year, writing with equal passion and lack of influence - and turn instead to the existence of ghosts. Here, I will oblige him to the best of my ability.

When asked about ghosts, Dr Johnson once affirmed their existence, giving in support the universal testimony of mankind. He had a point. In all times and places, and often without external influence, people have believed in life after death. Our earliest recognisable ancestors buried each other with their household goods, thereby showing a belief that these would be of continued use. Every nation of which I know has believed that the dead could be somehow brought in contact with the living. In the 12th book of the *Odyssey*, for example, Ulysses sacrifices a sheep, fills a trench with its blood, and waits for the ghosts that surround him to drink until they become visible and he can question them. In the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* - which I have yet to read - I believe that the spirits of the dead are summoned and questioned. My Chinese and Japanese students have told me some of their own traditional ghost stories. Turn where you will, people believe and have believed in ghosts. Who am I to doubt such universal testimony?

I suppose I can appeal to David Hume and his use of Occam's razor with regard to the supernatural - that we should not resort to more complex hypotheses than are needed to explain events. Every rational being knows about death. No one who ever looks on the disintegrating bodies of his loved ones, or imagines his own departure from this world, likes to think that this is the end - that the atoms of the soul are dispersed as irrecoverably as those of the body. Like causes produce like effects. The fear of death is universal. So, therefore, is belief in an afterlife. All evidence of such is charged with wishful thinking. No claims to personal acquaintance with the afterlife are too obviously born of fraud or delusion not be greedily accepted by someone. Moreover, whenever put to the same rigorous test as is brought to scientific hypotheses, no claim has ever been verified. Seen in this light, the existence of ghosts - though not, perhaps, of an afterlife - is to be rejected by everyone who is willing or able to regulate his belief according to evidence.

My only objection to this line of reasoning - and it may be a faint objection, I grant - is that I have often seen what many would regard as ghosts - and as recently as last autumn.

At about three o'clock in the morning of Wednesday the 9th October 2002, I was woken by a loud crash in the bedroom. I uncovered my head and looked across the room. Over by the door, I could see a woman standing. In the light from the window, I saw that the clothes I had piled on a cupboard by the door had fallen down, and this was the reason for the noise. The woman was tall and thin and dressed in what looked like elaborate night clothes. I thought at first it was Mrs Gabb coming back from a call of nature, and I prepared to mutter something peevish before pulling the covers back over my head. But I suddenly felt her lying beside me.

With a loud grunt and a convulsive sitting up in bed, I was now fully awake. Mrs Gabb now woke and uttered the peevish words. Of course, there was now no one else visible in the room. When I told her what I had seen, we discussed getting up and searching the house. But it was cold. We needed to get up early. We were also just a little reluctant to do anything but huddle together and hope for the best.

It was a dream, I hear you saying; and I quite agree with you. What is more likely - that clothes eventually fall down when carelessly piled, and that dreams frequently continue after a sudden waking? or that the spirits of the dead rise at night to disturb the living? There is nothing inconceivable about this second possibility, and so it might be true. However, there is no doubt of the first. Such things are common experience. Since, therefore, believing in ghosts is not necessary to explain the events of last October, I have no grounds for saying that I saw a ghost.

Mrs Gabb is less happy with this mode of reasoning. She insists that there is no firm evidence that ghosts do not exist, and sides with Dr Johnson. She also probably likes the thrill - at least in daylight - of believing that our house is not just a former naval brothel in need of extensive renovation, but has all the romance too of being haunted.

One of our occasional guests agrees. She claims to have heard a ghost in the house last summer, when staying with Mrs Gabb, I being in London overnight. Apparently, she lay awake in her bedroom on the top floor listening to footsteps in the attic. She was fully awake, and kept telling herself that there was no one above her, but was kept awake by the noise for some hours before falling asleep. I suppose I should question her about this. She is a solid, reliable witness, and generally refuses to believe in anything out of the common order of things. She also knows the difference between footsteps and the nightly expansion and contraction of old timbers. But I am too lazy to pick up the telephone, and so am left to repeat Mrs Gabb's account of what happened.

So did I see a ghost? My answer is still no. Even our guest must occasionally dream or suffer delusions; and this is more likely than that she heard footsteps in a place to which no person or other substantial living creature could have had access.

I am resolutely sceptical about the existence of ghosts or the truth of any paranormal claims. My problem, as said, is that I have, during the past 40 years, had enough possible experience of the paranormal to fill a paperback anthology. One of my earliest experiences - those disembodied white arms reaching at my face through a solid headboard - I have described already in an earlier issue of *Free Life Commentary*. But I recall many other similar experiences from when I was two or three. In one, a woman with a horse's head ran in diminishing circles round my bedroom. In another, a rug in the living room rose about an inch from the floor and began to drift back and forward. I sat on the floor beside this, too frightened to move or even to cry out, watching it drift past my feet, until my grandmother walked into the room and the rug instantly returned to its settled place. On both occasions, I seemed to be awake. On both occasions, every attending circumstance of sight and sound suggested that I was conscious in an otherwise orderly world. However, I deny that I was awake. I am unusual so far as I developed a retentive memory very early in life. But I do not believe that young children have a reliable awareness of the difference between the waking and the sleeping state.

The supernatural experience that I can most fully attest happened when I was 15. My grandmother had recently died. As I had been very close to her, I was more than usually affected by her death. Late one night, I was lying awake in bed. All was quiet in the house and quiet outside. Suddenly, I heard a loud bang above the ceiling. It was as if someone had struck one of the water pipes in the attic with a hammer. Then I heard another and then another. Soon, I was almost deafened by a loud and complex pattern of bangs from the pipes. It seemed to go on without end. At last, I got up and

left the room. Once I was in the passage outside, the noises stopped. I went downstairs to the kitchen and made myself a drink. All was now quiet again. No one else had been woken.

It was around this time, I later discovered, that I was dispossessed of an inheritance. Though she always put off making a will, my grandmother had frequently said in gatherings of our family that she wanted me to inherit her house in Chatham. Once she was dead, her son swore whatever declarations were needed to get possession of the house. He then sold it and declined to share a penny with my mother, quite ignoring any moral claim I might have had.

Now, was this a message from the infuriated spirit of my grandmother? Or do water pipes make odd noises? Or was I deluded in some way? Or is there, as my friend Mr Huet suggests, a separate but still supernatural explanation? I know which one I ought to believe. Plumbing is one of the great mysteries of civilised life, and no less everyday explanation is needed once this fact is apprehended. I remain, even so, not entirely convinced. Those water pipes never played up again to my knowledge; and the combination of circumstances in which they did play up that time keeps me unwilling to draw the most natural conclusion.

So, am I willing to say that there are ghosts? I cannot say for sure I have ever seen one. And no amount of weak evidence can be equal to one decent proof. On the other hand, I see no reason in itself why there should be nothing beyond the ordinary. As a sceptic and keen reader of David Hume, I have no time for claims about the power of reason to apprehend the nature of reality. All knowledge seems to originate in the fallible perceptions of our senses, and to be processed according to assumptions about cause and effect that are customary in nature. As such, deductive arguments for or against the existence of things outside the range of common perception are worthless. There might be a world of spirits parallel to that of the living, the borders between which occasionally wear thin. Or there might not. All I can say at the moment is that I have no reason to doubt that what we commonly see of the world is all there really is of it.

So, there are my thoughts on ghosts and the supernatural in general. They are rather less certain than my thoughts on Tony Blair - an evil man, I will repeat, who must be driven from office, thence to languish in the nearest state to oblivion that continued life allows.

Sean Gabb on Ghosts: An Anonymous Comment

A very interesting article.

Johnson's attitude to these matters was utterly pigheaded. All of a piece with his famous 'refutation' of Berkeley's empiricism.

After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it -- "I refute it thus." - Boswell.

But of course he did not refute Berkeley, and the Bishop's implication that 'believing is seeing' still underpins psychology-based scepticism towards 'the paranormal'

Despite my own intense scepticism I have always been fascinated by the subject, but the more closely we examine it we find that serious investigators (such as Colin Wilson) have become more

and more disillusioned as their researches have bogged down with an army of cranks and charlatans, all of whom stand to gain financially or otherwise from psychic research.

Wilson concluded sadly, after years of initially optimistic research, that he could find no evidence of a spirit world. The so-called poltergeist phenomenon may well be a natural occurrence we cannot yet fully explain and he found the apparent evidence of cases of spontaneous combustion entirely inexplicable although more recently entirely rational explanations have been advanced for these occurrences.

A friend of mine, researching for a major work on the correspondence of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, was obliged to sidetrack into Doyle's gullible involvement with the spirits. The figure of the once famous ghost hunter Harry Price loomed large. Amazingly, London University permitted Price on his death to endow a small library containing his works and papers, and they are now understandably reluctant to admit its existence, treated rather as the British Museum once treated their black museum of pornographic artefacts.

My friend gained admittance to the Harry Price memorial room and it did not take him long to uncover evidence of fraud among Prices own papers. A scrapbook contained a news cutting

describing a seance conducted after Doyle's death with Lady Doyle present. Doyle's widow had been astounded by revelations of minute details of their life names of cats, family jokes etc. Pasted opposite in the scrapbook was much older cutting an interview with Doyle in which all the details revealed at the sance were mentioned and underlined by Price.

Unfortunately, because of people like Price, honest researchers will not touch paranormal studies with a bargepole. At the very least, everybody will ridicule them.

**Sean Gabb on Ghosts:
A Comment by Stephen Howd <Howd@bopenworld.com>**

Sean,

Very interesting. I cannot claim to have had such experiences myself (more is the pity) but I have always believed in life after death. My reasons are too complex to try to explain fully at this hour of the night but essentially it is because I believe that there is plainly more to the human condition than the brutally biochemical. I also believe that the power of prayer saved the life of my youngest daughter (who was critically ill on a ventilator, "died", and came back to us against all of the dire predictions of the doctors). I asked God to take me and not her and I meant it, more than I have ever meant anything in my life; I feel sure that He heard me and pitied us and that is why she made it. I should say that I am not a very religious person in the conventional sense - I rarely go to church - but this experience has convinced me of the existence of God.

I entirely agree with you about Blair. At the suggestion of a leftie friend of mine who now lives in Mexico I now refer to him as "*El pincho puto*". If you don't understand that, I would be happy to explain it to you.

Regards,

Stephen Howd.

**Sean Gabb on Ghosts:
A Comment by Lawrence Boxall <lawrenceboxall@iib.ws>**

Sean, thanks. Very much enjoyed that having spent much of the last 4 weeks fighting local elections.

One observation - as 3 dimensional creatures operating only for a short while in a fourth, we can never know for certain what if anything exists beyond our cruelly limited senses. Hope and reason tells us that something must.

If it does not I don't suppose we will worry too much. If it does as Sir Alex Ferguson might say, it would certainly be a bonus.

Regards

Lawrie Boxall
