AN INTERVIEW WITH DA VE SMITH

COMEDY vs. the State

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From the Publisher

Jeff Deist

“Humor is just another defense against the universe.”

–Mel Brooks

As the country lurches into another election season, America feels untethered. Never has a virus been so politicized, or unleashed such bureaucratic power of dubious legality. Never mind that the case fatality rate for covid stands at or below that of the ordinary flu for people under age fifty; never mind the ever-changing media campaigns about “flattening the curve,” ventilators, asymptomatic spread, masks, and social distancing. The temptation for governors, mayors, and health officials to seize the opportunity and create a new normal—with them in charge—was just too great.

Now millions of American businesses are shuttered, while others barely operate. Restaurants and retail shops are lifeless. Bankruptcies mount. Displaced workers continue to rely on federal unemployment benefits, while small businesses make payroll only with the temporary aid of federal “Paycheck Protection Program” loans. Many schools stay closed, offering only listless attempts at online babysitting. And the V-shaped economic recovery remains an illusion.

So should we laugh or cry? The former is healthier. Humor, of course, is a supremely effective tool of persuasion. And our situation pales in comparison to past hardships borne by earlier generations. So as always, our task is to remain confident and cheerful in the face of our would-be totalitarians in government, media, universities, and, increasingly, corporate boardrooms.

Nobody in popular culture challenges the official narratives with humor and derision quite like comic Dave Smith. If you don’t know Dave, you should. He’s a rising force in the hugely influential world of podcasting, a successful comedian, and a serious reader and student. His thoroughgoing Rothbardianism, his knowledge of Mises and Hoppe and other seminal thinkers, set him apart from the know-nothings and anti-intellectuals littering YouTube. His skill with language, combined with his comedic timing and relatability, make him an impressive ambassador for our ideas.

If you recall my interview with Professor Paul Cantor, you know how effectively the Left took over popular culture. We’re seeing the impact of that takeover today, in a million ways. That’s why entertainers like Dave Smith are so important, to bring our ideas to new and broader audiences. Don’t miss our cover interview with him to understand how he’s pouring high-octane knowledge directly into the minds of his audiences.

David Gordon is back with another must-read book review, this time of Michael Anton’s new release The Stakes: America at the Point of No Return. Anton served briefly on the Trump administration’s National Security Council but is best known for his essay “The Flight 93 Election”—published in 2016 under the pseudonym Publius Decius Mus. His new work echoes many warnings of that earlier essay, positioning Donald Trump’s reelection as the only thing standing between any semblance of constitutional America and the black chasm of total rule by left elites.

Political atheists (and agnostics) may roll their eyes at Anton’s strident tone; we’ve all heard about “the most important election of our lifetime” many times before. But like his Claremont Institute colleague Christopher Caldwell, Anton is highly skilled in pinpointing specific sources of rot and decay. The Constitution may not be much good, but it’s not all bad. Its abandonment is a mistake. Money printing and moral hazard destroyed commercial banking. Federalization of issues turned states into glorified counties. Entitlements are a ticking time bomb. And the bowedlerized rewrite of American history to fit an oppression narrative will be our undoing if not stopped.

Mises Institute fans would do well to consider Gordon’s review before dismissing Anton as just another right-winger urging the reelection of Trump. His diagnosis, and proposed cure, addresses much deeper problems than any single election.

Finally, we are thrilled to have maintained a schedule of live, in-person events this year. We held very well-attended meetups in New Orleans, Birmingham, and Orlando, hosted our annual Rothbard Graduate Seminar, an energetic Mises University at our campus in Auburn with great kids, and (at this writing) are about to converge on Jekyll Island for a Supporters event. And we hope you will consider joining us in Texas with Dr. Ron Paul in November, where we will perform a postmortem on the election and its consequences. Register at mises.org/events.

As always, thank you for everything you do to promote property, markets, and peace. Nothing is more important than our intellectual mission.

Jeff Deist is president of the Mises Institute.
**COMEDY vs. the State**

**JEFF DEIST:** Dave, for starters you share a pedigree with Walter Block and Bernie Sanders. All three of you were born in Brooklyn, New York.

**DAVE SMITH:** Yes, that’s right. I’m happy to share a pedigree with one of those two people.

**JD:** Tell us a bit about your childhood. Did you attend public schools?

**DS:** I went to both public and private school in Brooklyn. I went to PS107 and then to the Berkeley Carroll School for middle school and high school. I remember reading Rothbard, about his experiences going first to public school and then private school. I didn’t like my private school much either, but it was much, much better than the public school. The public school was just a disaster. I still have a vivid memory of my third grade teacher giving the entire class all of the answers for standardized tests, citywide tests at the time. There were abusive teachers. It was really a horrible environment. I learned nothing while I was there. For all of the problems that my private school had, it was not nearly as bad. I feel about private school teachers the way Donald Trump feels about Mexicans coming into our country. Some I’m sure are good people, but they’re not sending their best.

**JD:** Tell us more about your home environment. Do you have siblings?

**DS:** I have a brother and a sister, but my brother is much younger. He’s thirteen years younger, from my mother’s second marriage. I grew up with a single mother and my older sister. We were lower middle class, and then moved into middle class. We moved a lot. I lived in probably nine or ten different apartments throughout my life. I was born in 1983 and grew up in what is now old Brooklyn and what I guess is now old America. I feel like I was the last generation where you would go outside unattended and

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Dave Smith is a New York–based stand-up comedian, radio personality, and political commentator. Dave can be seen regularly on *The Greg Gutfeld Show* and *Red Eye* on Fox News, as well as *Kennedy* on Fox Business Network. In 2013 Dave was featured as one of the “New Faces” at the prestigious Just for Laughs Comedy Festival in Montreal. He was also a featured performer on the New York Comedy Festival’s “New York’s Funniest” showcase in 2014 and 2015. Dave’s outlet for his social commentary is his podcast, *Part of the Problem*, which is available on iTunes. His one-hour special *Libertas* is available online at gasdigitalnetwork.com.
that was just what children did. If someone threatened to beat you up and you told an adult, they would probably tell you to punch him in his nose. It was a different world with no internet and no wokeism, the pre-9/11 America.

**JD:** Was your mother political?

**DS:** My mother was a liberal. She was a left liberal, but in the true sense of liberal. None of the woke stuff, but she was a Democrat and pretty much bought the Democratic party line. She’s changed a bit in the last few years, or perhaps she’s stayed the same and the Democrats have changed. But she was interested in politics. My mother and my stepfather would watch *Crossfire* back with Pat Buchanan and the guy on the left. That was on in the background.

**JD:** Michael Kinsley. And they were on five nights a week!

**DS:** Yes, Kinsley. She always read the *New York Times*. A pretty standard run-of-the-mill liberal Democrat.

**JD:** I’ve heard you allude to going away for college in a much smaller town. I suspect that was a culture shock for you.

**DS:** Oh, yeah. I went to Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York. A tiny little town, brutal winters. Winter starts in October and goes until April, and I just did not like it at all. It was boring and I missed the city. That college experience was not for me.

**JD:** Unlike Brooklyn, the only food you could find late at night was maybe Domino’s pizza.

**DS:** Yes! I remember Domino’s closed at midnight and if you didn’t catch them before they closed, that was it. There was nothing to eat—my New York City brain could not understand. I remember when I first went up there I thought: Okay, well what else is there? And no, there’s nothing else. And it was actually the first time, at college, I confronted wokeism—what’s now taken over the entire national discourse. It was very left-wing. I had a history professor who said, and this had nothing to do with history, but he insisted there were basically no differences between men and women. We’ve been socialized to believe this. I remember arguing with him. I argued, are you suggesting if women were raised differently they could compete in the NFL with men? And he said yes, very seriously. Yes, if we just raised little girls differently, they could be middle linebackers in the National Football League. And I remember thinking the whole thing was just really stupid. None of it was interesting to me, and I didn’t like living in the small town. I just wanted to get out of there.

**JD:** At this point, it looked like you were not destined to be a grad school academic type.

**DS:** No, I hated school. I was a very poor student throughout. Teachers always thought of me as that kid who wasted potential because I was bright but just didn’t care about schoolwork. I always did the bare minimum to pass. My big concern was not getting kicked off the basketball team, and I think you had to have a C average to play. I always managed to just get by, but I didn’t care about school, it didn’t interest me. I also didn’t like the whole system. When I went to Berkeley Carroll it was this wannabe elitist Park Slope private school, and I hated the whole culture. I had a few teachers I liked very much, but for the most part they were fake. It was probably a 90 percent white school at the time if I had to guess. But when you’d come in the entrance, there were pictures of the few black students so they could brag about their diversity. I immediately saw right through it.

**JD:** As an aside, though, I bet your old-school liberal mom really cared about you going to a decent school.

**DS:** Yes. She did. She very much did. My mother was the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and this had a big, big impact on her. She always identified with the downtrodden or whatever group she thought was oppressed. But she also had normal cultural values and thought things like families were very good.

**JD:** You began your career in New York City, which is the epicenter of comedy clubs. You’ve lived in Manhattan a long time, after Brooklyn. But with all the craziness of 2020, you’ve considered leaving. Isn’t that awfully tough for someone who is both culturally and professionally a longtime New Yorker?

**My mother was the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and this had a big, big impact on her. She always identified with the downtrodden.**
DS: Yes, it’s very tough for me. I’m truly heartbroken over what’s happened to New York City. To me, it’s nothing short of a tragedy. I think New York City is an amazing city. I know a lot of libertarians and small government types think of it as this hellhole, but I love the people and I love the culture. I love the museums and the restaurants and the theater and everything. I think it’s a great place. But I have a two-year-old daughter and I don’t want to raise her around heroin addicts. For her I need a nice house with a nice backyard in a good neighborhood. So I’m fond of a lot of aspects of New York City, but it’s time for me to get out.

JD: You describe your younger self as having standard boilerplate left-wing perspectives. Like all good Brooklynites, you disliked George W. Bush, who was president when you became politically aware in the 2000s. Maybe you disliked him for the wrong reasons, I don’t know.

DS: No, actually I disliked George W. Bush for the right reasons! I was a standard left-leaning guy. I didn’t know much about politics, but obviously we should tax rich people and give the money to not-so-rich people. Who wouldn’t want to do that? We should have a higher minimum wage—don’t you care about poor people? I wasn’t really thinking these things through, and coming to what seemed obvious left-liberal perspectives. But George W. Bush was a different story. I was eighteen on 9/11, and it had a big effect on me. I stood on Flatbush Avenue and watched people covered in debris who had walked over the Brooklyn Bridge because the subways were shut down. And I thought, oh man, maybe they’re going to bring back the draft! Maybe we’re going to be in crazy wars. Bush came to New York City a week later and said his famous line: “I hear you, Washington hears you, and soon enough the people who knocked down this tower are going to hear from you.” I was all in. I didn’t know anything about the history of US conflicts in the Middle East, but I thought, These bastards picked on the wrong enemy and they’re going to pay for this. But as the years went on I saw George W. Bush really didn’t care about who had attacked us on 9/11. He was using it as his excuse to invade Iraq and shred the Bill of Rights. When he finally said that he really didn’t care about getting Osama bin Laden—a few years later some reporter asked him about it, and he said, “I don’t really think about it that much”—I was furious. I was furious about that. He came to us in our moment of panic and lied to us. I could see through Dick Cheney and Bush. Being a left liberal it was easy to see through them, but I hated the Patriot Act; I hated the war in Iraq; I hated everything about those guys. I thought George W. Bush was unimpressive, kind of dumb, this elitist child who was gifted a silver spoon and handed the White House. I hated everything about him. In this sense my opinions haven’t changed. I was right about all of that.

JD: I like your natural reflexive inclination to care about your city on 9/11, to have a sense of home. You were angry when it was attacked.

DS: Yes.

JD: Libertarians are really shortsighted about this.

DS: Yeah, I completely agree. It’s been infuriating to me over the last few months. So many libertarians are dug into their preconceived biases. The cops are the bad guys, and the state is the bad guy, so they blindly support any group upset with the state. How could any normal person see mobs destroying cities and not think this is horrible? And for all the same reasons we hate the state? You know, the lack of respect for private property or civilization or basic human decency. For all of the same reasons you hate the state, you should hate these mobs every bit as much.

JD: In your twenties you were influenced by the 2008 Ron Paul presidential campaign. Talk us through that. What was your first moment when you felt your worldview changing?

DS: It was so random. I happened to be at my mother’s house and we were watching the Republican debate, in late 2007. This happened to be the famous Ron Paul–Rudy Giuliani exchange. I already was strongly antiwar, and I thought Iraq was the biggest issue of that election. That’s what I cared about. I assumed, well, George W. Bush is leaving and obviously we need to get a Democrat in there.

Many libertarians are dug into their preconceived biases. The cops are the bad guys, and the state is the bad guy, so they blindly support any group upset with the state. How could any normal person see mobs destroying cities and not think this is horrible?
If you don’t know anything about politics or history, it was easy to think Democrats were the anti-war party, even though most of them in Congress voted to invade Iraq. But they were positioning themselves as the anti-Bush, anti-war party, so I wanted to see one of them win.

And then I saw this exchange with a Congressman I had never heard of named Ron Paul—and he made the anti-war case better than any Democrat I had ever heard! You could tell, there was something real...Ron Paul’s authentic beliefs just pierced through the screen. You knew this guy really believed what he was saying. And I watched him mop the floor with Rudy Giuliani, and there was something about him. I know a lot of people were influenced by this moment, and I just really responded to his courage. People almost forget how the crowd was with Giuliani. Ron Paul had no support in that crowd and he didn’t care, it meant nothing to him. Ron Paul was going to tell the truth, and if you want to boo him out of the arena, that’s fine. And I immediately thought, Who the hell is that guy? How have I never heard of him? I started googling Ron Paul to read more about him, and then I watched every single Republican debate after that because I wanted to see what else this guy said. It was a really interesting dynamic, those debates in 2007 and 2008. It was a bunch of boring shills and Ron Paul on stage. The lineup was boring guy, boring guy, boring guy, really interesting guy. He started talking about free market economics and I thought it sounded kind of crazy, but he was so good on the war question I thought, Okay, let me at least look into this. Let’s see why he’s wrong. And as I got deeper, I was converted.

**JD:** Are there any particular books or articles you remember from that period?

**DS:** Well, I read Dr. Paul’s book *The Revolution*, but that might have been several months later. Through Google and YouTube I listened to Ron Paul’s speeches, and then I found Peter Schiff and Tom Woods. I started reading their articles, and then the economy crashed. These guys had been talking about it. Tom Woods kept talking about Murray Rothbard and the Mises Institute, and so I read *Anatomy of the State* and “War, Peace, and the State”—those two Rothbard pieces. And it was off to the races from there. I almost never looked back. I had to consume everything Murray Rothbard wrote. I was on mises.org every single day, reading tons of stuff. It really spoke to me.

**JD:** Rothbard’s work tends to punch you in the face.

**DS:** Yes. Maybe it’s my personality type, but that’s what I responded to. I loved being challenged. I remember reading Rothbard and sometimes I put the book down in front of me to look around for a moment and say “wow.” That’s what I liked to read, stuff that really slams you. Rothbard makes this unbelievably compelling case, and I spent so much time reading him and stuff from the Mises Institute in general. I started reading Lew Rockwell. It was life changing.

**JD:** Maybe it’s a Brooklyn thing, you seem to share Rothbard’s intransigence when it comes to moderation or compromise.

**DS:** I’m sure there’s something about my personality that makes me respond to that type of thing. But also when it comes to the subject matter Rothbard was dealing with, it’s the appropriate attitude to have. If we’re talking about a mass murder campaign in Iraq, why would we approach it with anything less than that energy?

**JD:** How do you describe yourself to someone who asks about your politics?
**DS:** I pretty much agree with Rothbard on everything. I don’t know if it really makes sense to call yourself a Rothbardian or a Keynesian or whatever. But if I was going to be associated with any one thinker, I’m quite comfortable with it being Murray Rothbard.

**JD:** I’ve heard you mention in particular *The Ethics of Liberty* to listeners. That’s really the quintessential normative Rothbard.

**DS:** If I’m recommending Rothbard to people, I usually start with *Anatomy of the State* and “War, Peace, and the State,” like I mentioned earlier. Maybe that’s because I read them first and project my own sensibilities onto others. But *The Ethics of Liberty* gives you the most compelling argument. And to me, it also speaks to my role in this whole movement. I knew we had all of these really brilliant academic types, but I felt I could speak to regular people. I don’t think libertarianism should exclusively be for academics. I really think of us as abolitionists, essentially. We want to abolish slavery and we believe people should be free. We want to abolish slavery to the state rather than traditional chattel slavery. There might be some brilliant economists in 1845 who could explain why slavery is actually not as efficient of an economic system as free men voluntarily interacting with each other, but any normal person could just be an abolitionist. You don’t have to be an intellectual to understand this is wrong and should be abolished. I feel the same way about libertarianism today. And so I like books that can just speak to regular people where they are.

**DS:** I think his most controversial articles, at least among left libertarians, propose right-wing populism or “paleolibertarian” strategy. I’ve probably read “Right-Wing Populism” a dozen times, and I think at first I was like, This could be a problem, maybe he shouldn’t have written this. And then every time I read it, I’m a little bit more sympathetic to it. Most recently I read it and thought he’s just completely right. The guy is a prophet, I mean he’s right about everything. And of course a lot of people who criticize the article really misrepresent it or give it the least charitable reading. If you read the article with an open mind, you’ll realize that he’s not straying from Rothbardian principles at all. He’s analyzing the political moment, that moment being 1991 or ’92, and making some very good points. Much of it proved to be absolutely correct. You can disagree, but thinking the country was ripe for right-wing populism, thinking libertarians’ best bet was populism—how can you argue with that in hindsight?

When I’m recommending Rothbard to people, I usually start with *Anatomy of the State* and “War, Peace, and the State.”

You have the [Charles] Koch and [Ed] Crane types, who have been trying to get into corridors of power and influence the government for decades. There’s been zero success from that. You have the Hayekian model of trying to influence the influencers, win the intellectuals over. There’s been zero success in that. Libertarian philosophy is more toxic in a university than critical race theory! Far more toxic. So, there’s been zero success in any of those efforts. The only success libertarians really have is the Ron Paul movement. It was a populist movement that got people up out of their seats and convinced them this whole system was screwing them over. If you’re being honest, admit Rothbard was really onto something.

**DS:** I pretty much agree with Rothbard on everything. I don’t know if it really makes sense to call yourself a Rothbardian or a Keynesian or whatever. But if I was going to be associated with any one thinker, I’m quite comfortable with it being Murray Rothbard.

**JD:** Talk about Hans-Hermann Hoppe. He still draws a lot of ire, but in many ways he continued where Rothbard left off. What is Hoppe’s influence on you?

**DS:** Hoppe had a tremendous influence on me. I mean, I think that Hoppe is brilliant. He does draw a lot of criticism, although it’s almost never actually based in any of his work or anything he’s said. There are a lot of provocative memes on the internet with Hoppe and people are outraged about those, but I think his work has been enormously valuable. He explains the true implications of a private society, and has the best, most useful thought experiments about different cultural issues. Things like immigration, covenant societies, time preference. With any interesting or controversial thinker, you can always find things they’ve said throughout their career which are not supposed to be said. But if you look at the body of Hoppe’s work, I think his contributions to libertarianism
are, with the exceptions of maybe Mises and Rothbard, almost unrivaled.

JD: How much Mises have you read? Do you feel like you have a respectable grounding in economics?

DS: For the people you hang out with, Jeff, probably not so much, but for normal people, yes, I’m doing very good! I’ve read Human Action and I’ve read Socialism and I’ve read plenty of articles on mises.org. I’ve read a lot more Rothbard than I have Mises, probably a lot more Hoppe than I have Mises also. I’ve also read Bob Murphy’s Choice, so I’ve absorbed a lot of Mises through other people too. Let’s say for a comedian I’m very sound on economics.

JD: Talk about your career. To an outsider, comedy seems like a brutal business. Has it taught you to be entrepreneurial, to control your own content, to have multiple income streams? Twenty or thirty years ago you simply would have a manager or an agent, but now, not so simple.

DS: That really changed just in the time since I started in 2003. Older, more established guys explained how you need to get into all of the clubs, then you need to get a manager or an agent, and then you can get on television. That was the system and there was no way around it. But right around that time, social media started happening. There were a few comedians on MySpace who started building up big followings. Little by little, it all changed and became a completely different world. Now you can put out your own content, directly to your fans. You don’t have to rely on gatekeepers. It’s a challenging business, but you’re trying to tell jokes for a living—so why should it be given to you easily? I came around at the perfect time in many ways. I feel very lucky. I got into comedy before wokeism overtook everything, so I was already a little bit established. Somebody like me is never going to get a network TV deal today, but who cares? Who cares about that? I can build up my own audience and do what I want to do. I literally get to do stand-up comedy, tell jokes, rant about libertarianism, talk to the people I admire, the most interesting thinkers of our time. I get to do all of this and make a really good living and support my family. This is everything I want to do. I don’t really want to be on Saturday Night Live. I’m very fortunate to work in a time when all of this is viable.

JD: I read a quote from you saying the Left has waged a full-scale war on comedy. If there’s any line of work that ought to be spared from cancel culture, surely it’s stand-up comedy.

DS: You would think so. That certainly was true when I first started stand-up comedy. Wokeism has been creeping into different parts of society for a while now, but it was not a factor in stand-up comedy. No one cared if a joke was offensive. If you could write an offensive joke and still made the crowd laugh, everybody respected that. That’s the hardest thing to do—to say something that would normally turn people off but it’s still really funny. In the last five years or so things really changed. There’s a huge push in the corporate comedy world, Comedy Central, Netflix, all of these different companies, to push diversity for the sake of diversity. But only left-wing perspectives. And wokeism does not lead to funny. It never does. If you look around the broader world of comedy, not just stand-up comedy, but watch an episode of The Office—you could never put

Dave Smith’s one-hour special Libertas and podcast series Part of the Problem are available online at gasdigitalnetwork.com.
this on television anymore. This is only from seven to eight years ago. You could never put something like that on television anymore. The left woke types have set up parameters that all of the greatest comedians could not work within. George Carlin, Richard Pryor, Chris Rock, Dave Chappelle, any of these guys would have to be canceled. And in fact, Dave Chappelle draws heat like he hasn't kept up with the times. But really he's still just funny and they have a problem with that. There's also this counterculture, which I guess I'm a part of now, where people just want funny comedians. A lot of people just want comedians to make them laugh, and are very ripe for antiwoke comedy.

JD: We tell most celebrities or athletes to shut up and sing or shut up and dribble the ball. But we want comedians to get political, it's funny. Look at Lenny Bruce.

DS: Absolutely. A comedian is a different thing, but it's not even about shut up and dribble. It's not that we don't want a great basketball player to say anything. What we hate is when they repeat the same basic and boring approved opinions. I thought it was really interesting when Dennis Rodman talked about North Korea. I thought it was really interesting when Kanye West talked to Trump about criminal justice reform. People get sick of people in Hollywood or the NBA or NFL saying the same predictable things. That's what turns people off. But to your point, comedians' whole job is to give you their point of view. Obviously with the goal of being funny, but comedians can't shut up and do comedy. They have to talk in order to do comedy. So, it's particularly absurd to expect comedians to keep quiet about politics.

JD: You've always been un-PC in your approach and you haven't been afraid to combine politics with your act or your podcast. Your comedy special Libertas has plenty of expressly political material. Does that come naturally to you or is it a conscious choice?

DS: In terms of stand-up, it really wasn't a conscious choice. It just started happening. I started comedy before I was a libertarian and so I had a whole act which had nothing to do with politics, but I became obsessed with libertarianism. All I wanted to do was read more and more about free markets and the history of the liberty movement and politics in general. So it just crept into my act, little by little. It's what I was thinking about all the time, so I'd end up writing jokes about it. Weirdly, in the last five years or so, almost every comedian became political—but they all had the most boring superficial takes...not all of them, but the majority. It got to a point when I put out Libertas, well I have this whole hour of the jokes I've been making about the state of America and the 2016 presidential race. It just made sense to put that out as a show.

JD: You've also done a lot of cable news. You've appeared on Fox and CNN, which no doubt increases your visibility. Are you ever struck by how basic and superficial those shows really are?

DS: I've gotten used to it at this point, but I sure was at first. I think it's something about Pareto distribution, but the truth is most people are unimpressive. This is true in stand-up comedy, most comedians are unimpressive. It's true in academia. Cable news and journalism in general are no exception. A very small percentage of people
are actually impressive. Cable hosts can do the job, they're essentially literate in their job. They can read the teleprompter, they can host a show, they can graduate college. But in terms of being an impressive thinker, there are very, very few.

It feels weird, and still does, to be the most interesting person on a panel. It's easy. Just have something interesting to say—for God's sake, they're only giving you a minute or thirty seconds to talk, so whittle it down to the most interesting thing you have to say! It amazes me. I'll be on one of these panels and you're maybe going to get three questions. Someone will get a question and just waste the time saying nothing, just filler words and basic nonsense with no real point! Why do you even want to do this? It's shocking how many people that describes in the cable news world. Both hosts and guests. Cable news is dominated by mediocre thinkers.

JD: As you put it, they all sound like a Bank of America ad.

DS: Yes.

JD: You describe how your industry has changed, it's not about clubs or getting on Johnny Carson anymore. You're trying to make a living as a comedian, but you also are a podcaster, you also go on cable news shows. You also do other people's podcasts, you do live streaming specials. You engage heavily with fans and critics on social media. You have all these different ways of getting your content out there. This sounds like a very entrepreneurial venture, a one man band.

DS: Exactly. Getting on Carson was the big thing for stand-up comedians back in the day. If you got on Carson and he liked you, you could make it as a successful stand-up comedian. After Carson retired you had to get on Leno or Letterman, maybe Conan O'Brien. Then Leno retired and there's Fallon and these other guys. It reached a point where if you get on Conan, you get to do seven minutes of stand-up comedy and a few hundred thousand people will see you. And that's nice, but the years go on and on and every week Conan's got three or four comedians on his show. Appearing on his show doesn't really separate you from the pack, even with the three hundred thousand people who saw you for seven minutes. Even if they liked you, they probably forgot about who you were. By the next month, they had seen seven more stand-up comedians and it didn't move the needle at all.

Suddenly you could get on Joe Rogan's podcast where 8 million people see you. They're not seeing you for seven minutes telling some jokes, they're seeing you for three hours. You go in-depth on everything about you as a person and your beliefs. If you gain a fan from that, it's a whole different type of fan. That fan is invested in you now. So appearing on a big podcast is better for your career than going on one of these late night shows. Little by little that became true for having a Comedy Central special or an HBO special. They don't matter as much anymore. What matters is having a relationship with your fan base. Lucky for me, I was able to get on Rogan and the shows that matter.

JD: Rogan, for example, reaches a huge pop audience—but a reasonably cerebral and thoughtful pop audience. I interviewed Professor Paul Cantor, who loves *South Park* like you. He laments the complete takeover of pop culture by the Left. There is an opportunity for people like you to engage the broader public and make them think a little bit.

DS: Absolutely. Rogan's audience is more thoughtful and more interesting than your average television viewer, for sure. Something happened to the Left. If you go back to the 1960s, they were at least the fun ones. They really were. They made funny comedy and funny movies. Even conservatives would have to admit the left-wingers are probably more fun at parties. But something changed, and the Left embraced woke scolds and gave up fun. They've ceded the ground of fun, and not just in some degenerate sense. Now it's the woke scolds who are uptight. It's an interesting dynamic where the roles have been reversed.

JD: The other day I saw where Johnny Rotten, Johnny Lydon of the Sex Pistols, wore a red MAGA T-shirt. This was purely performance art, but the Left couldn't help pouncing. They don't like him because a few years back he committed the sin of supporting Brexit. So a MAGA shirt is the new punk rock.

DS: Pat Buchanan said conservatives won the Cold War and lost the culture war. And there's no question about either of those things. The United States of America outlasted the Soviet Union and that's a pretty wonderful thing, but the counterculture has taken over the country. It is now counterculture to be a Christian who wants to have a family and live by traditional values. That is the most counterculture thing you could do at this point. Not having a tattoo is more of a statement than having a sleeve of...
tattoos on your arm. It's strange because it just doesn't feel right. It doesn't feel right for either side. It's very different from most times in human history. But if you were to walk down the streets of New York City with a T-shirt that said “kill cops” that would not be provocative at all—not nearly on the level that wearing a MAGA hat would be.

**JD:** Let's wrap up with two slightly personal questions. First, you have always led with your antiwar position. You've always made it a hallmark of your public persona. For your generation, US wars in the Middle East seem like part of the permanent landscape. So, how did war become such a motivating issue for you?

**DS:** It all goes back to 9/11 and the response. There's my family history. My grandfather was a refugee from Germany, a Jew who was basically born in the worst place at the wrong time. He enlisted in the US Army and fought in World War II. My stepfather fought in Vietnam. So I have some veterans in my family who know about the evils of war, but to me it's the worst thing in the world, the worst thing anyone could possibly do. And yet somehow it's completely accepted by the Democrats and Republicans who are doing it. It drives me crazy. You hear about what's happened to the people of Iraq, the people of Afghanistan and Yemen and Syria and Libya. It's a huge tragedy, a biblical level of evil. It is accepted and it drives me crazy. Most people in this country don't want these wars anymore and yet they persist because really evil interests make money off killing children. Even with all the crazy stuff going on in America, there's nothing more important than ending this.

**JD:** That dovetails with my final question about fatherhood. You haven't shied away from discussing the impact of having a little girl. You haven't shied away from discussing the question of abortion. You haven't shied away from talking about why families matter and why we shouldn't view political liberty as atomized individualism. This probably does you no favors in comedy circles. Have you always had this perspective?

**DS:** I certainly haven't always had this perspective. It's something that grew. I really changed when I met my wife, I changed when we got married, and I really changed when she got pregnant and had our daughter. My heroes were guys like Murray Rothbard and Ron Paul who would always tell the truth, even when it was not going to do them any favors. Rothbard was connected to powerful people like the Koch brothers. He could have compromised a little bit and had a much cushier life than he had, but he chose not to because he wanted to tell the truth.

Ron Paul was friendly with Reagan and a lot of powerful people. He easily could have been a star in the Republican Party. If Ron Paul just toned down the antiwar stuff, he could have been a made guy in that world, but he refused to because he wanted to tell the truth.

Those are the guys I really admire. I was somebody who lived a very degenerate lifestyle for a long time. I was a comedian on the road, a single guy. I did that for a while. Then I met a really great woman and settled down and got married and had a kid. And I realized life is so much better. Who would I be if I didn't share that with my audience, particularly the younger men who listen to me who are a large part of my audience? How could I not tell them about these traditional institutions like marriage and family which can be really wonderful?

Young men are really disparaged in our culture today and I don't think that’s good. I don't think that’s helpful. I don't think it’s helpful to have a huge percentage of children raised in single parent households, and it certainly won't create a culture that supports liberty. Little by little I came to all of these conclusions.

I'm going to say it, whether it's about family or God or being pro-life. I have a family, this is how my thinking evolved and changed. I'd always rather be the person who tells the truth, and let the controversy come, that's fine with me. Now I have a daughter, and I'd like to be a role model for her. What type of role model would I be if I avoided controversial issues because I was afraid of being called a mean name?

We think of people as being courageous, but historically speaking there's not much courage involved. What's going to happen? Someone on Twitter will call you a mean name? I get my YouTube channel banned? I'm not worried about being shot in the public square. If other people could speak up when they faced real dangers, I should have enough courage to tell the truth.

**JD:** Very well said, Dave.
Michael Anton is best known to the public through his essay “The Flight 93 Election,” published in 2016 under a pseudonym in the Claremont Review of Books. It warned of the dire consequences if Hillary Clinton were elected. Anton, an authority on Machiavelli, was long associated with the so-called West Coast Straussians of the Claremont Institute, and he was personally close to Harry Jaffa. But although Jaffa is not absent from The Stakes, the book’s presiding genius is my old friend Sam Francis. The book is excellent. It is well-written, thoughtful, and imaginative. It has much to teach us, and, although I disagree with a number of points in it, I’ll stress the insights.

Before proceeding, I need to allay, at least in part, one source of misgiving. Anton disparages “market fundamentalists,” and some of my readers may for this reason cast the book aside. It would be a mistake to do so. Anton writes, “Even more decisive, though, in turning finance to the left has been the adoption of government-backed central banking and fiat currency, which make private banks effectively appendages of the state. If anyone had any doubt about the truth of that observation before 2008, the TARP bailouts should have put the matter to rest for all time.” Later in the book, he wonders “whether it’s possible to maintain a fiat currency indefinitely with endless money printing and whether said currency can long maintain its global reserve status.” Dr. Ron Paul could not have said it better.

In one of the best sections of the book, Anton sets forward his understanding of the Constitution. He says, “Our founders sought to establish the weakest possible federal government capable of performing its essential functions,
for three fundamental and intertwined reasons. First, government is inherently dangerous, so the less power it has, the better. Second, the states—being closer to the people and more responsive to regional differences and needs—are better equipped to handle most matters than a far-off centralized administration. Third, the states were prior to the federal government; the people, through their states, created the latter to serve them, not the other way around.”

Anton continues: “According to the parchment [the Constitution], the federal government is supposed to field and fund an army and navy, protect the borders, make treaties, regulate foreign trade and interstate commerce, maintain a sound common currency...and that’s about it. But if you haven’t noticed, there is almost nothing today that the federal government doesn’t do—or try to. The fact that it fails embarrassingly at most of the tasks it sets itself never circumscribes its ambitions, which seem to multiply by the year.”

Again sounding like a supporter of the free market, Anton says about the federal budget: “That leaves about a trillion for means-tested welfare—which, like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, are not constitutionally authorized; they are also of dubious and uneven effectiveness at best.”

Anton notes that the founders believed that the American Revolution was grounded in universal truths, “but they did not expect their declaration to revolutionize the world—nor were they under any illusion that it, or they, had the power to do so....America is—in the words of John Quincy Adams—‘the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all’ but also ‘the champion and vindicator only of her own.’”

Those who wish to restore these principles face a challenge of unprecedented severity. Anton argues that an elite based in certain blue states disdains ordinary Americans. “The core message of the meta-Narrative is that America is fundamentally and inherently racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic, transphobic, and so on. The flaws and sins of America derive directly from those of its founding stock, who are natural predators, inherently racist, and malevolent.”

Elite policy is at its worst in California, now under the near-total domination of the left wing of the Democratic Party. “In modern California, hypocrisy and double-standardism aren’t merely part of the business climate; they’re endemic to the whole society....Sam Francis dubbed this system ‘anarcho-tyranny’: complete freedom—even exemption from the gravest laws—for the favored, maximum vindictive enforcement against the pettiest infractions on the disfavored.” Anton fears that if President Trump isn’t reelected, the Democrats will seek actively to suppress whomever in the red states challenges them, and they will prove very difficult to dislodge from power.

Who are the ordinary Americans the elite disdains, and who are the elite? The ordinary Americans are those whom Hillary Clinton called “deplorables,” i.e., white males who value their family, their religion, and their property, including their guns. “Funny thing, too: a core tenet of modern liberalism is supposed to be the sanctity of ‘one man, one vote.’ Except, you know, not
If elite dominance continues, Anton predicts that those of us who dissent will be rigidly restricted. “Free speech as we have known it—as our founders insisted was the bedrock of political rights, without which self-government is impossible—will not survive.”

really. The barely concealed presupposition of denouncing Republicans as ‘racists’ simply because whites vote for them is that all votes are not created equal. Votes of color are morally superior to white votes, which are inherently tainted. Which is why the left holds any election won by a Republican to be morally if not (yet) politically illegitimate.”

The elite consists at its core of wealthy financiers and business interests allied with government. It is buttressed by professionals who have attended top universities, especially those of the Ivy League. In a way that readers of Hunter Lewis on “crony capitalism” will recognize, Anton writes: “So-called ‘public-private cooperation’ will increase. This benign-sounding phrase—who could object to ‘cooperation,’ to government and business ‘solving problems together’?—masks a darker reality. What it really describes is the use of state power to serve private ends, at private direction. Hence foreign policy...will be further reoriented around securing trade, tax, and labor ‘migration’ patterns and paradigms that benefit finance and big business.”

If elite dominance continues, Anton predicts that those of us who dissent will be rigidly restricted. “Free speech as we have known it—as our founders insisted was the bedrock of political rights, without which self-government is impossible—will not survive coming leftist rule. The playbook is already being expanded to include banking and credit. Getting on the wrong side of elite-woke opinion is increasingly to find oneself locked out of the financial system: no bank account, no credit card, no ability to get a loan or pay a mortgage. Pay cash? The move to a ‘cashless society’...will obviate that option right quick.”

Anton cites an especially chilling instance of the policy of suppression. “A new regulation in the United Kingdom—which we must assume will be proposed here sooner or later—would allow Britain’s National Health Service to deny non-emergency care to those deemed ‘racist, sexist, or homophobic.’ Government bureaucrats, naturally, will be the ones doing the deeming.” Small wonder that Anton has had enough.

The author seems to me misguided in what he says about “industrial policy,” but I’ll pass over that in silence. He criticizes Murray Rothbard who suggested that the principle of secession has no logical stopping point, down to the level of each person. Anton says, “Every-man-a-government-unto himself is literally Hobbes's ‘state of nature,’ yet Rothbard appears to approve.” This rests on a misunderstanding: it hardly follows that if you have a right to secede that you will in fact do so, and Rothbard did not favor a world of one-person “nations.” Also, Anton doesn’t understand John Rawls very well.

But enough of criticism. Anton’s rhetorical talents are remarkable, and I urge everyone to read his book.

David Gordon is Senior Fellow at the Mises Institute, and editor of the Mises Review.
My name is Christian Niczyporuk, I am fourteen years old, and I hope to be a Mises University student someday. I enjoy bike rides, singing, and classic cars and taking road trips all around the United States. Latin is one of my favorite subjects. Mark Twain as well as Ludwig von Mises make the list of my top authors. My inspirational historical figure is Marcus Aurelius and I have adopted his wisdom as a personal motto: “Because a thing seems difficult for you, do not think it impossible.”

The very first step I took toward Mises was through my mother. My mother is one of those people who will research until she finds the truth. She brought my attention to Ron Paul’s Liberty Report and from there I discovered the Ron Paul Curriculum for homeschoolers with Tom Woods. While studying I found the gold mine of schooling: the Mises Institute. I love the Institute and their work so much that we had to stop in Auburn, Alabama, to see the Institute in person on our next coast-to-coast road trip.

The staff was super welcoming and kind and we were treated like VIPs. They showed us around the entire building, and it is phenomenal. A highlight of the Institute is the bookstore full of life-changing books. I am looking forward to reading Crony Capitalism in America, Democracy: The God that Failed; and 33 Questions about American History You’re Not Supposed to Ask.

I got to meet the one and only Lew Rockwell! Mr. Rockwell is a kind and caring man with an ambition to win back the freedom that we have lost to our monopolistic government. It was an absolute honor to meet him.

There are a few things that I like about Austrian economics. One is that it is not the ersatz economics that teaches that fiat currencies are right and that they are an investment and a great thing. That is not true, because fiat money is just a piece of paper meant to be backed by the gold standard. Thanks to “Tricky Dick.” By 1973, he took the dollar off the gold standard. As a result of this, the economy has crashed multiple times after the shock of the early ’70s. I like that Austrian economics teaches you about entrepreneurship, asset management, and so much more. Also, it makes logical sense. For example, Austrian economics teaches you to invest and be financially self-reliant.

I am grateful to my Polish immigrant parents for having cultivated a heart of humanity and compassion, and so thankful that they took the advice of Ron Paul to start teaching me fundamental freedom and liberty.

–Christian
Radio Rothbard is a weekly antipolitics podcast hosted by Jeff Deist. The show tackles politics, current events, culture, media, and the predatory state, all from an uncompromising Rothbardian perspective. You don’t want to miss it. FIND IT AT MISES.ORG, ITUNES, STITCHER, AND SOUNDCLOUD.

“I have a total of sixty students in my three economics classes at Anthem Preparatory Academy, one of twenty-eight charter schools in the Great Hearts network (Arizona). Our mission is to form students’ souls by guiding the student in a discovery of truth, beauty, and goodness. We focus a little less on STEM and don’t teach to the tests but have a similar rigorous curriculum that produces some great results.

The Mises Institute plays a significant role in this pursuit in our tenth grade economics course. Students start the year by watching and discussing the Economics for Beginners videos provided at mises.org/begin. Next, each student signs up for the Mises Wire and reads one of the featured articles of the day. At the end of the week, students submit a paper summarizing one article from the Mises Wire and analyzing the article from an economic perspective. The course uses a Socratic teaching style to review significant thinkers such as Amity Shlaes’s The Great Society, Ludwig von Mises in his work Liberalism, Henry Hazlitt’s The Failure of “New Economics” and Economics in One Lesson, Hayek’s The Road to Serfdom and The Use of Knowledge in Society, Leonard Read’s, I, Pencil, Bastiat’s The Law and Government, Thomas Sowell’s Basic Economics, and Murray Rothbard’s Human Rights Are Property Rights and For a New Liberty. The monopolistic state education system is churning out young people enamored with socialism and statism. As a teacher on the front line, I am grateful to the Mises Institute for providing resources to educate our high school students on the economic and moral benefits of liberty.” —Doug Pillsbury
A Beautiful Gift!

In August, we received a wonderful donation from some extremely brave and passionate Misesians in China.

This beautiful crest is hand carved out of a single piece of rosewood and set with agate stones. The artist, Yang Qiang, has been making beautiful handcrafted pieces for more than twenty years. This work of art will proudly be displayed at the Mises Institute.

We are honored and thankful for our Chinese friends and their colleagues who are doing heroic work translating and publishing the ideas of the Austrian school in China.

*Our heartfelt thanks to Guojie Jia and Shanna Han for this addition to our collection.*

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Tom Woods Goes Viral

Tom Woods’s prophetic talk “The Fact-Free Lockdown Hysteria” from this summer’s Mises University has gone viral. So far it has more than 816,622 views on YouTube. You can view it at [mises.org/hysteria](http://mises.org/hysteria).

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New Tax Rules for 2020

- Deduct up to $300 for charitable giving in 2020 ($600 per couple), in addition to the standard deduction.
- Deduct donations up to 100% of your 2020 adjusted gross income for cash gifts to any charity.

Be sure to check with your tax preparer about these new rules.

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Upcoming Events

- **November 7, 2020**
  Symposium with Ron Paul
  Lake Jackson, TX

- **March 19–20, 2021**
  Austrian Economics Research Conference
  Auburn, AL

- **June 6–11, 2021**
  Rothbard Graduate Seminar
  Auburn, AL

- **July 18–24, 2021**
  Mises University
  Auburn, AL

Student scholarships are available for all events! Details at mises.org/events.
For the fourth consecutive year, the Mises Institute has achieved the highest rating, a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, the largest and most utilized charity evaluator in America. It evaluates the financial health, accountability, and transparency of over 9,000 charities and 1.8 million US nonprofits. Charity Navigator accepts no advertising or donations from the organizations it evaluates to remain unbiased.

The Mises Institute stands firm in accepting no government money, period! We proudly continue to be wholly funded by private donations from interested people like you. We are humbled that during these unsettled financial times our faithful Members continue to support our mission of a radical shift in the intellectual climate, away from statism and toward a private property order. Your trust, support, and interest mean so much to us.

Thank you! We will work hard to earn another 4-star rating in 2021.

Mises Meetup in Orlando

In what has become an annual event for the Mises Institute, we had a sold-out crowd for our meetup in Orlando, Florida, on August 29. This year Jeff Deist and Dr. Patrick Newman discussed “The Uneasy Future of America.”

What do months of lockdowns, protests, unemployment, and raw political animosity mean for America’s future? In his talk, Jeff looked not only at the real economic impacts of the policy failings of federal and state leaders across the US, but also for reasons to have optimism given some of the decentralist trends we are seeing play out in red and blue states alike. In his follow-up, Dr. Newman put the contemporary landscape in historical context, going so far as to voice concern that Kamala Harris may be uniquely positioned as a modern Woodrow Wilson—like figure should a Biden-Harris ticket win in November.

We featured a live episode of Radio Rothbard, providing a Rothbardian lens on current events.

Dietmar Georg, a long-standing Institute Member, brought his personal collection of important historical artifacts from the history of the Austrian school. Included in the display was Ludwig von Mises’s dissertation, several first edition German prints of his work, a signed first edition of Rothbard’s For A New Liberty, and a beautiful portrait of Ludwig von Mises that was previously featured at the FEE mansion in New York.

Special thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Greg Roe for making this event possible.
Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution of □ $25 □ $50 □ $75 □ $100 □ $250 □ $500 □ Other ____________________________

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