A photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco at dusk. The bridge's towers and cables are illuminated with warm orange lights, contrasting with the cool blue and purple tones of the twilight sky and the dark water of the bay. The bridge spans across the water, leading towards the hills in the distance.

a BEACON
of TRUTH
interview with david theroux

David J. Theroux is the founder, president and chief executive officer of The Independent Institute, the recipient of over thirty awards. Publisher of the quarterly journal, *The Independent Review: A Journal of Political Economy*, he holds four degrees from the University of California and University of Chicago, is founder and president of the C.S. Lewis Society of California, and was founding vice president and director of academic affairs for the Cato Institute and founding president of the Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy.

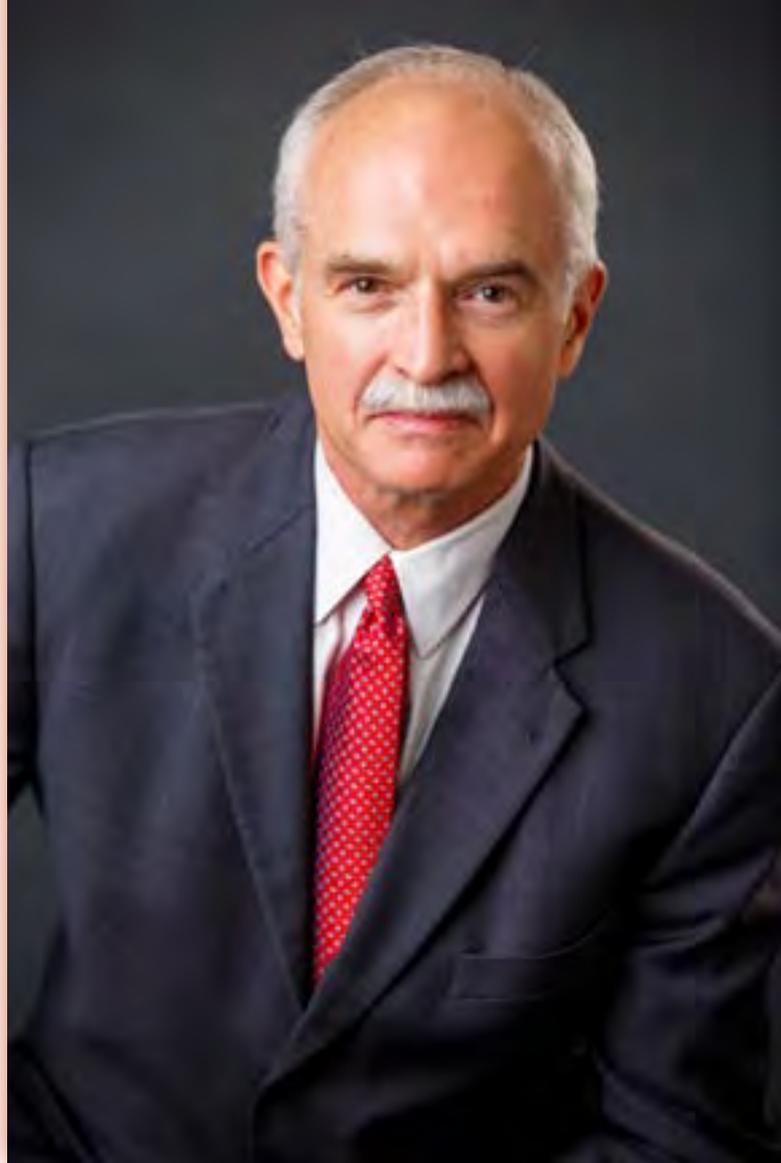
Having directed and published more than one hundred scholarly books, Mr. Theroux is the editor of the books, *The Energy Crisis*, *Private Rights and Public Lands* (with P. Truluck), and *Politics and Tyranny*, and his scholarly articles have appeared in the *Journal of Private Enterprise*, *Culture and Civilization*, and elsewhere. His articles and reviews have also appeared in *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *Washington Times*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Dallas Morning News*, and other publications, and he has appeared on ABC, MSNBC, Fox Business Network, CNN, C-SPAN, NPR, Voice of America, and other local, national, and international TV and radio networks and programs.

Lara-Murphy Report: We have been impressed not only with the scholarly positions of The Independent Institute, but also of the courage you showed in the wake of 9/11, when most other free-market groups were sticking their fingers in the air to see how popular it would be to stand up for individual liberty in that environment. Can you explain to our readers what The Independent Institute stands for?

David Theroux: When the tragic events of 9/11 hit, the Independent Institute was among a precious, few, free-market groups that did not either completely cave in to political expediency or cower from speaking out. And as we have warned, these events have been used to fan the flames of government spending, debt, and power to unprecedented levels. The work of our Senior Fellow Robert Higgs (e.g., his books *Crisis and Leviathan*; *Depression, War and Cold War*; etc.) has proven to be prophetic in showing how crises, especially war crises, are used to expand government power, and since 9/11 we have seen enormous losses of life combined with trillions of dollars spent on unending wars, massive pork, entitlements, cronyism, and economic nationalism.

The mission of the Independent Institute is to boldly advance peaceful, prosperous, and free societies, grounded in a commitment to human worth and dignity. Through our many books, quarterly journal *The Independent Review*, Policy Reports, events, media projects, and student programs, we aggressively work to redefine and redirect the most important debates of today while working to secure the free societies of tomorrow.

In our work, we have been privileged to have received many awards including more Sir Antony Fisher International Memorial Awards than



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any group worldwide. And this past year, we have also received three Eric Hoffer Best Book Awards, five IPPY Awards for Best Book (from the Independent Book Publishers Association) and two PROSE Best Book Awards (from the Association of American Publishers).

As a result, the Institute’s publications and events earn the highest praise and our communications based on this work resonate across society. More specifically, we annually have 3,000 print articles, 300 million monthly readers, upwards of 340 TV/radio interviews, and 5.5 million web visits. Our weekly email newsletter, *The*

Lighthouse, reports on new studies and commentary by our fellows and our blog, *The Beacon*, was named the #1 Libertarian Blog by the *Washington Times*. We have recently released our free MyGovCost App based on our website, the Government Cost Calculator, and we have further posted more than 340 videos online and on our YouTube Channel and began producing a new video series, *Independent Watch*. In all, we annually reach 3.1 billion across print/web/broadcast (TV, radio).

LMR: In contrast to other organizations that focus on teaching what we might call “the classics” of liberty and economics to the next generation, it has seemed to us that The Independent Institute has focused on producing original scholarship. Do you agree with this assessment? What are some of the most important books that the Institute has recently published?

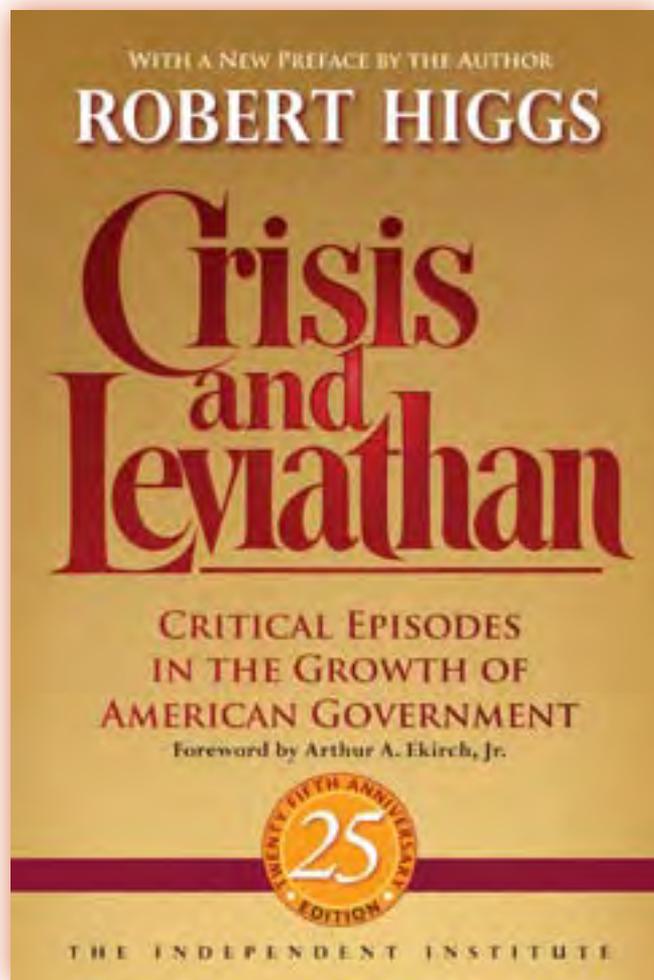
DT: With over 140 fellows, we have been quite privileged to work with many, superb scholars in producing seminal, peer-reviewed books and other publications that advance the ideas of liberty. Our doing so is aimed at pro-

ducing information that can withstand any scrutiny in questioning the fatal conceit of the Zeitgeist over any and all social and economic issues. More and more people are becoming disillusioned with the fallacious, “progressive” narrative of Big Government, and we want to connect with them with perspectives grounded in the ethics of liberty and civic virtue that they can trust and utilize.

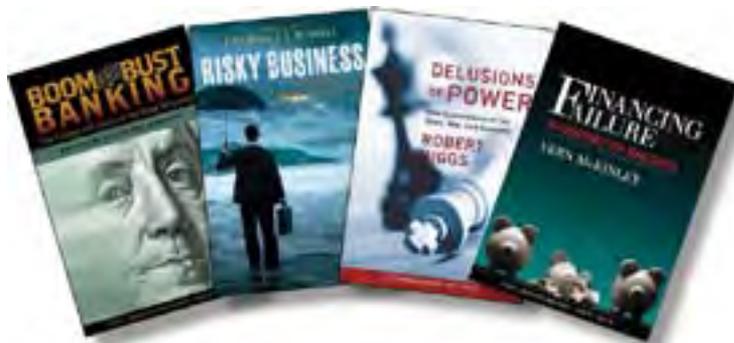
A sampling of our recent, notable books includes:

- *Priceless: Curing the Healthcare Crisis* (John C. Goodman)
- *Living Economics: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Peter J. Boettke)
- *Gun Control in the Third Reich: Disarming the Jews and “Enemies of the State”* (Stephen P. Halbrook)
- *The Power of Habeas Corpus in America: From the King’s Prerogative to the War on Terror* (Anthony Gregory)
- *Global Crossings: Immigration, Civilization, and America* (Alvaro Vargas Llosa)
- *Financing Failure: A Century of Bailouts* (Vern P. McKinley)
- *Delusions of Power: New Explorations of the State, War, and Economy* (Robert Higgs)
- *Aquanomics: Water Markets and the Environment* (B. Delworth Gardner and Randy T. Simmons, eds.)
- *No War for Oil: U.S. Dependency and the Middle East* (Ivan Eland)
- *Beyond Politics: The Roots of Government Failure* (Randy T. Simmons)
- *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government, 25th Anniversary Edition* (Robert Higgs)

LMR: You personally have a great interest in C.S. Lewis. Can you tell us about it?



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“Lewis was memorialized by being inducted into Poets’ Corner at Westminster Abbey in London, as one of the most notable thinkers and writers in history.”

DT: C. S. Lewis has been one of the most influential writers of the 20th and 21st centuries, and his books continue to sell at astounding rates, with films, stage productions, concerts, schools, and public forums of all sorts based on his work. For example, this past fall and to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Lewis’s death (November 22nd, the same day when John F. Kennedy and Aldous Huxley also died), Lewis was memorialized by being inducted into Poets’ Corner at Westminster Abbey in London, as one of the most notable thinkers and writers in history, alongside such figures as Chaucer, Samuel Johnson, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Coleridge, the Brontë sisters, John Keats, Jane Austen, T. S. Eliot, and John Milton. What also stands Lewis apart from others is not just his enormous influence as a rational convert from atheism to Christianity but his remarkable track record in challenging the urban legends of “modernism,” including naturalism, reductionism, nihilism,

positivism, scientism, historicism, collectivism, statism, coercive egalitarianism, militarism, welfareism, and dehumanization and tyranny of all forms.

Lewis also well understood the power of and need for the enduring truths of “story” or metanarrative in all of our lives, and his greatest successes have been his novels, including the 7-volume *Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Screwtape Letters*, the 3-volume *Space Trilogy*, *The Great Divorce*, and *Till We Have Faces*. Lewis knew that good stories reflect and lift us up into deeper truths, and the natural-law tradition is one key element of these truths.

Lewis is best described as a natural-law, classical liberal, and his piercing critique of the presumptuous, secular claims of “modernism” shatters the basis for most of the folly and indeed evils we see so rampant in the rise of statism in

the modern world. Lewis was a scholar by profession, having held positions at both Oxford and Cambridge, and his scholarly books remain indispensable in the study of Medieval and Renaissance literature, including Milton, Spencer, etc. But Lewis wrote extensively in philosophy, theology, both adult and children's literature including science fiction, literary criticism, biography, and current affairs, with his Christian, natural-law perspective vividly woven throughout. For anyone interested in liberty, Lewis's books *The Abolition of Man*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *God in the Dock* are must reading.

LMR: More generally, there is a significant element of the libertarian/free-market community that is not merely agnostic, but is openly hostile to theism. Do you have any thoughts on this phenomenon?

DT: The existence of agnostic, atheist, and anti-theist thinking among some libertarians and pro-market people has largely resulted from the ready access to the novels of Ayn Rand, but this tradition is deeply rooted in the "Enlightenment project" of the 17th and 18th centuries. What Rand tried to do was re-position moral ethics as an objective standard of natural rights against the utilitarianism and moral subjectivism of the post-Enlightenment's secular abandonment of natural law. Her problem was her trying to ground her ethics in naturalism itself when the entire basis for natural rights sprang from the theism of natural theology.

As a naturalist, Rand believed that only the natural world exists (i.e., all of reality consists solely of matter, energy, and the laws of physics). But as Lewis shows in his book *Miracles*, if all of human behavior is simply "matter in motion," determined mechanically and materialistically by emergent "fitness" as somehow programmed



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by the laws of physics, then no thought, including the theory of naturalism itself, can be known to be true or not. Indeed for naturalism, no free will to infer and make arguments can exist since all human thought is merely bio-chemical reactions determined physically. However, such reductionism refutes itself because all human inferences (including those by Rand) must assume as pre-conditions the “properly basic

or reciprocity. As Lewis well noted, “A *dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery.*” If morality is based solely on self-interest or reciprocity, then no objective standard exists to determine what is or is not moral other than subjective self-interest. The naturalist tries to conflate the “is” with an “ought” but ends up in an unwork-



“If all of human behavior is simply ‘matter in motion,’ determined mechanically and materialistically by emergent ‘fitness’ as somehow programmed by the laws of physics, then no thought, including the theory of naturalism itself, can be known to be true or not.”

knowledge” that one’s mind, free will and other minds do exist independent of material determinacy, refuting the very basis for naturalism. In other words, all human inferences necessarily first assume a metaphysical dualism (substance dualism) which means that naturalism alone cannot explain reality. As a result, the naturalist assumptions by atheists produce a self-refuting and incoherent view in that they must then deny the existence of the very human attributes and factors of existence that they seek to defend (e.g., free will, reason, individual agency, objective truth and morality, science, etc.).

Moreover and contrary to Rand and other naturalists, morality is not based on self-interest

able dilemma. As such, if someone believes that using invasive violence against another (e.g., murder, theft, rape, and fraud) can advance his/her own interest and the chance of being caught is slim to non-existent, then morality for this person (“fitness” or in Rand’s case, “selfishness”) equals aggression against the innocent because all morality is merely subjective and situational. For the naturalist, the person “is” capable of doing harm to benefit himself/herself and necessarily “ought” to do so since only “fitness” applies. Hence, Nazi ethics would be equivalent to Thomist or Jeffersonian ethics, depending upon the situation because “fitness” assumes that there is no objective standard and that all brain states and truth are subjective. Indeed, this is the



mendations for the best strategy that The Remnant should adopt to swell its ranks—or does that mindset miss the point?

DT: I am an optimist because (1) ignoring the natural-law principles of eth-

dilemma that all utilitarian-rights theorists have in trying to achieve a standard for morality and explains the historical decline of classical-liberal thought which, once abandoning natural law theory, was left clinging to the shifting sands of moral and epistemological subjectivism. Interestingly enough, since “radical altruism” has been considered the highest standard for human behavior in societies worldwide since the dawn of mankind, this powerful evidence for natural law suggests that self-interest cannot explain morality.

Lewis’s critique of naturalism is known as the “Argument from Reason,” and highly influential, contemporary philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga have since produced a very powerful literature that re-establishes the philosophical basis upon which the ideas of individual liberty, personal responsibility, the rule of law, civic virtue, and free markets rest.¹

LMR: What is your long-term view on the prospects for liberty? Do you have any recom-

ics and economics is unsustainable and always collapses as a result of what Frederic Bastiat called “the seen and the unseen,” (2) all people instinctively understand the natural-law principles that murder, theft, rape and fraud are wrong and should be outlawed, and (3) we are relational beings who seek to love and be loved and all such relationships are based on trust among people that only natural-law principles consistently champion. For liberty to advance, a critical mass of any society must apply these truths universally to all people *in or out* of government, and institutions based on natural law are essential to maintain a society in which abrogations of the natural law are held to a minimum and certainly not institutionalized as they are today into Big Government. As I mentioned before, we see today more and more people disillusioned by the arrogance, corruption, and folly of Washington power over their lives, and the Independent Institute and other freedom-lovers have a unique and grand opportunity now to connect with these growing numbers to advance the ideas of liberty for the future.



References

1. For further reading, see the following articles: <http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=1756>, <http://www.lewissociety.org/reason.php>, <http://www.veritas-ucsb.org/library/plantinga/Dennett.html>, and http://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/naturalism_defeated.pdf.