



Episode 423: How the Fed Is Helping the Few and Hurting the Rest

Guest: Angela Keaton

WOODS: I appreciate all the promotion of the show you've done. You have been a frequent re-tweeter of the episodes, so I appreciate that; we'll link to your Twitter on the show notes page, TomWoods.com/423. But let me tell you what we're also going to link to, and that's the subject of our conversation today: we're going to link to Freedom Fest, the event that takes place every July in Las Vegas. There are many, many different people and groups represented there. We're going to have the schedule for Freedom Fest there, because I want to talk to you today about a debate you're having with the author of a book on war, which we'll also be linking to at TomWoods.com/423. So I'm leaving all that to you to describe for us. What is going on with you at Freedom Fest this year, 2015?

KEATON: Well, it's a funny story. I've actually been a Freedom Fest attendee since the original Freedom Fest, which was a FEE-sponsored event in 2000. It's a right – what I'd probably reasonably say is a right-leaning event, different forms of the Right. And this debate will be with a classicist professor, named Ian Morris; he teaches at Stanford. And the book is called *War! What is it Good For? Conflict and the Progress of Civilization from Primates to Robots*. And Professor Morris' contention is that war in the long run – and when he says "long run," he means the very long run, thousands of years – is good for civilization. And what undergirds that, I think, is something that probably many in your audience would find questionable, if not even offensive – and he doesn't explicitly say this, but it's understood – is that you need large, centralized governments to create things like markets, civilization, free trade, the civil societies. And war is part of what creates that.

He starts it off with the Hobbesian view of the world, which is pretty grim. He does believe that change is caused by people being lazy, greedy, frightened, and looking for easier and more profitable ways of doing things. And he talks about how conflicts – I mean, beginning with like the basic tribal conflicts for limited resources – you want those to end, and those can be better by large, centralized governments – which to me is not in keeping with the way I think a lot of us who listen to the show, as well as people who will be attending Freedom Fest, will be thinking about things.

But the thing that I think I find most offensive – and I'm arguing, I'm going to be debating this from the Right; this'll be a discussion, and I do a lot of discussions of why people should be anti-war from a conservative perspective, and even from a religious

perspective, which I think kind of conflicts with the type of style that Ian Morris represents in terms of the Right – his Right, which is sort of the "West is best/western civilization is best" perspective. So I think it'll be a conflict of different visions of what it means to be on the Right. And that may be even a deeper issue. But for people who don't know me in the audience, I work for AntiWar.com, where I've been here fulltime since 2008 and will begin my –

WOODS: Oh yeah, I gave them an earful about you before I brought you on. Oh yeah –

KEATON: Right –

WOODS: But keep going, yeah.

KEATON: Well, AntiWar.com is unusual. We do editorials, analysis, and news aggregation all on anti-intervention, anti-imperial, anti-occupation, anti-torture, but we don't represent – we're not foisting our staff's point of view. Our staff tends to be pretty strictly libertarian, and pretty much a direct line – kind of a direct lineage from Murray Rothbard himself. Actually, you can go as far as saying we're pretty much descended from Ayn Rand herself.

So AntiWar.com's libertarian credentials are airtight. But we do not foist that on the readers. Our readers come from all over the spectrum, and kind of the running gag is we print everyone from Noam Chomsky to Pat Buchanan. And that's been actually good, because it brings in people from different perspectives, because we want to end war, which any conservative and any person of faith certainly would wish to do. It takes some mass movement, and it needs to be a very narrowly tailored mass movement, where we stick to strictly issues of war and militarism.

WOODS: Yeah, let me jump in on that. That's why I'm so glad that it was Justin Raimondo and Eric Garris who got the domain name, AntiWar.com, back in the mid '90s, early on in the history of the Internet as we knew it. Because I don't think that that kind of ecumenical approach would have necessarily been taken if, let's say, other parties had grabbed AntiWar.com.

KEATON: No, certainly not. And certainly not if what I call the "corporate Left" – not to be confused with the actual Left – had taken over. But the corporate Left is sort of the Democratic Party/anti-Republican/anti-war efforts, which were shallow and not particularly based in any kind of ethical thought or moral tradition, which is not good for the anti-war movement. I mean, there's reasons why we're anti-war, and they're not necessarily political.

WOODS: By the way, just so that people understand, on today's show notes page I will also link to – I want them to understand why I'm doing this – an episode where I had Michael Humor on, and he went through what he considers to be some of the weaknesses of the Hobbesian presentation, so that might be relevant here.

But do you think there is any merit whatsoever in our opponent's book? I can't imagine that there would be, but how are you going to go about this? I mean, you could – if you were debating this in front of just a typical audience of just random people, you would go right at his thesis, full-throated, and just nail him over and over. But you're dealing with an audience that's going to be mostly libertarian.

Now, let's bear in mind that Freedom Fest, as you say, attracts a lot of people from a lot of different traditions. And when I've been there, I've noted there are a lot of older people who feel like they're being really cheeky by voting for Mitt Romney. And I'm wondering, what are you doing here? Do you have any idea what this thing is? But there are a lot of those people there. I remember when Anthony Gregory was debating the legacy of Winston Churchill –

KEATON: Yes.

WOODS: People couldn't believe anybody had the gall to debate the legacy of some politician. Now, of course, I'll get criticized for calling a demigod "some politician," but I couldn't get over the attitude, that it was irreverent of him. And his opponent spent half the time saying, you're not worthy to shine the shoes of Winston Churchill, and how dare you question him. And that was half of his argument. I thought, I can't believe this is happening in a place called Freedom Fest. Anyway, you've got a libertarian audience, so are you going to – you could just say, well, this thesis is not libertarian, as opposed to saying that it's not correct. What's your plan of action?

KEATON: Well that's what I'm actually debating in my head and working with some people on who are more thoughtful about these things. Because I think it'd be wrong for me to attack kind of the evolutionary psychology/sociobiology methods that Professor Morris is working from. Those are not falsifiable, and they also I think tend to be a little bit alienating and take us away from sort of the central points, because even though Professor Morris himself will concede that war is horrible, he has a difficulty – one of the difficulties in his thesis is he has trouble seeing human beings as individuals, because he has such a long-term vision, like a vision of literally thousands of years.

You know, when we're talking 10,000 years, it's very hard to see the individual in that. That's when humanity just becomes a collection of advanced apes, and I find that somewhat distasteful. I'm not debating whether or not we're apes, but I just think that seeing human beings like that is fairly distasteful, and I think we should be morally evolved beyond that, and be able to recognize that the individuals exist, and individuals have rights not to be killed, not to be maimed, not to be tortured by the largest, most brutal gang of all, the state.

And I think that's really well in keeping within many of the Right traditions that are represented at Freedom Fest, including objectivism, which is sort of where I initially began with Ayn Rand, recognizing that the individual is sacred. And I think that's also in keeping, too, with traditions of faith where the individual is something to behold;

it's a real thing. And that is part of why I have such a visceral reaction to these sorts of arguments.

So where I'm really beginning – and other people have heard me make these arguments before to other groups – but part of it is you can't have conservative values and a warfare state. They are utterly incompatible on such a fundamental level. The militarism of our culture has had a horrible effect – it's having such a horrible effect on the family. It's the most anti-family institution. And when we talk about Murray Rothbard's welfare-warfare state, I mean, these things are very interconnected. But as much as we disdain welfare, warfare is far more disturbing. Military lifestyles and what war makes people do is not compatible with family values, with pro-life values, and how it is that people who want to live moral and ethical lives should be doing.

First off, what sort of culture really respects the idea – and this is kind of rooted in being a patriot in America and supporting nationalism and American exceptionalism – and the Left uses that term, but I think the Right should take that term seriously too, because it really displaces God and the family as the moral compass. But when you have the military lifestyle, you're asking for divorce; you're asking for adultery; you're asking for domestic violence and alcoholism and suicide, which certainly – I mean, I'm not disputing that, from the libertarian perspective, people have a choice to end their own lives, but it's certainly not in keeping with most faith traditions. And none of those things I mentioned – all things are pathologies that are extremely acute within the military, which is a very large – if we're honest about it – a very large welfare program. None of those are in keeping with family values; they certainly aren't pro-life values.

And we can take it further. Think about Iraq – I mentioned Anthony Gregory earlier – Anthony often refers to Iraq as being the war crime of the 21st century. When you think about depleted uranium and you think about what the U.S. invasion/occupation have done to Iraqi culture, absolutely it has destroyed the family and created such pathologies, including things like disturbing the environment to the point where women regularly, spontaneously abort. Pregnancies often end prematurely, and the fetuses are horribly maimed and disturbed by – well, not just the warfare itself, but what is left behind by those polluters at the Department of Defense and U.S. military. And I don't know how that possibly could be in keeping with any claim to a conservative faith or pro-family tradition. I don't know how that could possibly be supported.

WOODS: Well, and also for people who belong to one form or another of Christianity, I have never understood how they can sit back and not only tolerate but cheer on what is obviously blasphemy, when you see, for instance, bumper stickers that say, "Only two people ever died for you: Jesus Christ and the American soldier." And the American soldier is held up to a kind of idolatrous reverence. It is so ridiculously over the top, and it happens in churches; it's all over the place. They're singing patriotic songs in church; they've meshed the United States with the Kingdom of God, with the City on a Hill – all these concepts and images that are biblical images are now being transformed into secular images pertaining to the U.S. and the U.S. government. And

this should be outrageous to these people, but they cheer it on, because for a lot of these people, this is the only thing that they've ever known.

I want to point, because we're talking about the different ways in which the Right might be appealed to – I have a chapter in my – I have a new book called *Real Dissent*, and there's a chapter in there about Robert Nisbet, who was a sociologist, but a conservative one, taught at Columbia. And he wrote at great length about the anti-conservative nature of war. And I pointed that out and said, who's going to denounce him as being an unpatriotic conservative? Well, thankfully, none of the people writing idiotic articles like that have ever heard of Robert Nisbet. But I do have a chapter on that.

There are people – I'm not making this up – there is a tradition on the Right that says that war overturns all kinds of settled tradition. It has to be overturned at all costs. It's not something to – and by the way, they say we have to make war a last resort. They always say that. They never mean that. Right? They never mean that.

And, by the way, one other thing: I want to ask you – you did talk about objectivism briefly; you mentioned that as being one of the traditions. What exactly is the deal with objectivism and foreign policy? Can you account for why objectivists, who are supposed to have this skepticism toward the state, nevertheless when it comes to the most horrifying thing the state does, they cheer it on to a degree that is way beyond what the traditional neocon would cheer? The traditional neocon at least gives lip service to just war theory and trying to avoid killing civilians. Their view is collateral damage is not even anything we should worry about for one second. I'm not exaggerating.

KEATON: No, and this is a little more of a complicated history. I mean, part of it was the commercialization of objectivism, when people like Leonard Peacock had taken control of objectivism proper, and it became almost a brand name, as opposed to a really thoughtful tradition. And as well as people confusing – you know, Ayn Rand, absolutely one of the most brilliant people of the 20th century, but that includes, was not without fault, was not without sin. And I think some people take some of her literal thoughts – and all of us have different thoughts about these things, because we're human beings – some of her racism towards Arabs and, you know, taking basically a fundamentalist tradition, a fundamentalist interpretation of some of her thoughts being part of the actual philosophy of objectivism, which is extremely critical of centralized power and puts the individual first and takes an extremely strong stance against the idea of collectivism – which racism is one of the most insidious forms of collectivism, where you don't recognize an individual; you're just creating an artificial category and condemning it, as opposed to a person.

Objectivism went off the rails on September 11th, and I think people like myself, who were normal objectivists, were sort of stripped of our objectivist badges that day and were sort of left afloat. And personally, I ended up kind of recamping with the paleolibertarians, the left-libertarians, because they were clearly the ones who were pushing forward – basically understanding the Rothbardian tradition of war as being

the worst thing the state does. The state does horrible things on every level, whether it's stealing from small businesses to even things that don't seem very important like traffic tickets all the way to committing acts of mass murder.

So that's, I think, also too the libertarian movement really was destabilized on September 11th, and I think we saw – what I consider the weaknesses in mainline libertarianism or the respectable thoughts of libertarianism, really is as bad as some people on the left say it is. We saw that on September 11th, where they lost the faith – I'm kind of using that somewhat ironically – in the idea that the individual matters and small government is better and no government even better than that. So yeah, there's a lot there to tear apart about what happened to objectivism, and it's shameful.

However, I have seen, thanks to Ron Paul, a more civilized objectivism, a more thoughtful objectivism has made a resurgence, and I see that with Students for Liberty, youth, with their commitment to the anti-war issue and anti-war events on campuses and making the war issue the primary one. So I think we've managed to recover as a movement, but it took basically anti-war activists like Ron Paul to do that.

WOODS: There is, of course, a magazine that you're very familiar with, *The American Conservative*, that tries to rekindle that old right-wing understanding of interventionism as being something, at the very least, to be very, very much avoided, if they wouldn't necessarily say avoided altogether. And they've gotten some traction, but then I look at this 2016 presidential field, and it's like these Republicans have learned nothing. They've had eight years of Obama, and they still seem to think that the problem is this one person. They have not, apparently, learned anything about the Federal Reserve, the military industrial complex, anything. It seems that they haven't learned anything. I want Huckabee again! I want Romney again! Now, of course, Romney's not formally in there, but he's polling pretty well. They've learned nothing.

But yet that demographic ages and ages all the time. Give us your crystal ball here. What do you think happens in the future with anti-war? Is it that the younger people, the rising generation, is going to take back foreign policy and change things around because they're idealistic? Or do they follow the Bill Clinton trajectory? They start off young and idealistic, and then when they come of age, they want to do some bombing.

KEATON: Oh, I don't know that Bill Clinton was ever young and idealistic –

WOODS: Yeah, I know, I didn't know how else to put that.

KEATON: And he certainly has spent a great deal of time essentially bombing Iraq every three days. He's a horri— Bill Clinton's a war criminal. You know, youth and idealism – I don't know how – I mean, there are people who will try to make the case to me that the GOP, the younger people in the GOP lean libertarian. That may be true. But there are all kinds of other factors that I can't possibly even begin to start weighing.

Where I think that Ron Paul makes the difference – it's not in terms of the way young people vote, but in terms of an actual counterculture where war and torture and occupation are considered morally reprehensible. And so now you have young people living different lifestyles that all come from the Ron Paul – that all come from that movement, including living off the grid, living more rural lifestyles, and being more thoughtful in not interacting with the government.

And I think that's a cultural shift; I don't think that's an electoral, a political one. I think it's just in the way people are living their lives, and that is to me the hope for the future, not in any electoral process. Our system is not designed to change elections; it's to maintain the political class or the 1%ers, as the Occupy Movement would call them. So I don't think there's any – I never would put any hope in any of those people anyways. It's too much like religion in a very unmoored way.

WOODS: Let's get back to this debate very quickly. What exactly is the format?

KEATON: The format – and actually that's being decided on now – I believe each of us will have about 15 minutes to speak, about 5 minutes each to reply, and about 20 minutes of questions and answers. I am very nervous about this; I'm not much of a public speaker, and I tend to be very introverted. So this will be a challenge in many ways.

WOODS: Wow, it's like a baptism by fire, then. Wow.

KEATON: Yes. And also, there are going to be quite a few people that will be hostile in the audience. I mean, this is that –

WOODS: Oh, no doubt, no doubt. But there'll always be that good cohort of our people. I mean, not just libertarians you haven't met, but – I remember we had a group of Gary Chartier and Sheldon Richmond and a few of us – Bob Murphy – who showed up to cheer on Anthony Gregory.

KEATON: Yes.

WOODS: And cheer him on we did. And it'll be that same group, no doubt, who'll be there to support you. What are your parting thoughts as you speculate on this? First of all, what is the exact date of your event?

KEATON: I believe it's July 8th, and it's on the Freedom Fest calendar. The schedule is already up. So it's already on there and settled. I believe it's Thursday afternoon, July 8th. And of course there'll be plenty of competition for me. The Skousens have literally an unbelievably packed lineup for all the days that people are there. So there's literally something for everyone at every minute.

WOODS: Oh, it's true, it's true. I mean, there are some plenary events where there's only one event going on at once, but typically, there are six, seven, eight, nine, even ten things going on at the same time slot. It is unbelievable how many things happen

at Freedom Fest. If you can get there, you're going to have a lot of fun. And you will be enraged by some of what you hear, and you will be puzzled as to what those people are doing there. But that's just part of the charm, I've come to conclude, of Freedom Fest. You do a lot of shaking your head, but you do a lot of nodding your head too, and you have a good time while you're at it.

Well, we're going to be cheering you on, Angela Keaton. I won't be able to be there this year, but spiritually I'll be cheering you on, and I certainly wish you all the best. You certainly are doing very important work here in being willing to stand up to this type of increasingly popular thesis, I'm sorry to say. So good luck, and thanks for your time today.

KEATON: Oh no, thank you.