Former Vice President Dick Cheney and then-President George W. Bush attend a Washington, D.C. inaugural event in 2005. (The White House)

Are Americans capable of committing atrocities on the same scale as Germans did under Nazi rule? That is the question that University of San Francisco ethics professor Rebecca Gordon and Truthdig Editor in Chief Robert Scheer grapple with in the latest installment of “Scheer Intelligence.” Gordon, author of “Mainstreaming Torture” and “American Nuremberg,” posits that if America’s actions in the Middle East, especially in Iraq, were to be scrutinized the way Nazi Germany’s crimes were probed in the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. would likely also be found guilty of crimes against humanity.
Gordon begins her comparison by exploring the main charge levied against Nazis during the Nuremberg trials, which was committing a crime against peace due to Germany’s breach of the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, which, she explains, “essentially outlawed war.” American prosecutors in the mid-20th century insisted that this initial crime was the unlawful act from which all other crimes committed by the Nazis originated.

“By comparison,” the author tells Scheer, “I look at the Bush-Cheney administration’s decision to make an unnecessary and illegal war, both in Afghanistan and especially in Iraq.

“It’s very clear from the documentary record that exists that the main reason people were being tortured [by the U.S. before the Iraq War began] was because they wanted to get somebody somewhere to say that Saddam Hussein was in league with al-Qaida, so that there could be an excuse for invading Iraq,” Gordon says.

Throughout the so-called war on terror, the ethics expert says, the U.S. has also violated several rules set forth in just-war theory, including what constitutes collateral damage and proportionality, in its slaughter of countless Iraqi civilians.

“We took what had been one of the most vibrant, developed and cosmopolitan countries in that part of the world—which was Iraq—and we essentially did what [U.S. military officials] used to say they wanted to do to North Vietnam: bombed it back to the Stone Age,” Gordon says.

Click here to listen to Scheer and Gordon discuss a range of moral issues that Americans for several generations have swept under the rug as the government both openly and secretly commits crimes in their name abroad. You can also read a transcript of the interview below the media player.

Robert Scheer: Hi, this is Robert Scheer with another edition of Scheer Intelligence. The intelligence comes from my guests. In this case, it’s Rebecca Gordon. And she has her doctorate in ethics and social theory. I teach ethics at USC; you teach at the University of San Francisco, which is a Catholic school, so presumably with all their difficulties they’re still concerned about ethics. And actually we have a good pope, in major ways, who’s dealing with the subject I want to talk to you about: the ethics of war making, and the violence that has been unleashed on the world. And you wrote two very important books, maybe the most important in some ways. One is called Mainstreaming Torture, and another is called America 2
n Nuremberg.
So the question I want to ask you, you know, because we’ve always treated the crimes of others, particularly the Germans, the worst crimes of modern history, as an aberration in the development of the human race. Those people went berserk, crazy, and they were evil; now we have another category, Muslims are evil, they do terrible things. We’re recording this on a day where in New Zealand, some 48 people trying to practice their religion were killed. So we see a lot of crime against Muslims, as there was obviously a lot of crimes against Jews and other people. And in your writing, you’re very clear that the crimes of Nuremberg, of the Nazis, are a low level of evil. But the real question is, the Germans are so much like Americans. They were—largest number of immigrants in this country were Germans; they’re a white, Anglo-Saxon population; they’re highly educated, probably the highest level of music and science at that point. And can it happen here?

Rebecca Gordon: And that, of course, is the question many of us have been asking at least since the election of 2016, and probably before that. And the answer in some ways, of course, is that it did happen here with the invasion of the Americas by people from Europe, and the destruction of all the peoples who were living here at the time. So there has been a genocide on this continent and in South America that, you know, we just forget about, because it happened a while ago. But coming to Nuremberg, what I was trying to do in the book is to say how important the principle was that was established at Nuremberg, which is that international law is real law. And when you break international law, there are genuine consequences, and people can and should be held accountable. So what I looked at was the conduct of this so-called War on Terror in the post-September 11th period, and asked: Could the United States be accused of the same categories of crimes for which the Nazi leadership were held accountable? And there were three categories that were established by the prosecution, and these were crimes against peace; ordinary war crimes, which had already been well described in the body of international law; and a new category, crimes against humanity, which was created in order to take in the enormity of what had been done in Europe by the Nazis. But what was very interesting is that it was Americans who insisted that the first of these crimes should be crimes against peace. So what’s that? That means making an aggressive war. It means starting a war that was not a war of self-defense, that was not a war of so-called necessity, but making an aggressive war. Why was that illegal? It was illegal because Germany and the United States and many other countries in Europe had signed a treaty in 1928 called the Kellogg–Briand Treaty, which essentially outlawed war. It said that nations will not use war to settle their disputes. And the argument that the U.S. prosecutors made was that all the other crimes that the Germans committed actually sprang from this first crime of making this aggressive, unnecessary, illegal war. And so by comparison, I look at the Bush-Cheney administration’s decision to make an unnecessary and illegal war, both in Afghanistan and especially in Iraq. And just as the Nazi crimes arose from this making of a war that was wrong and illegal, the U.S. crimes—and specifically now because my area of expertise is torture, I look at the reasons why the United States became involved in torture. And in the beginning, it’s very clear from the documentary record that exists, that the main reason people were being tortured, both in the CIA dark sites and also at Guantanamo under the Department of Defense, was because they wanted to get somebody somewhere to say that Saddam Hussein was in
league with Al-Qaeda, so that there could be an excuse for invading Iraq. And so the other crimes–

**RS:** But wait, let’s be very clear about that. This would be like the Nazis saying, Jewish bankers destroyed our economy and colluded with Western powers, and therefore made life untenable in Germany. That was the vicious scapegoating argument to justify Nazi expansion and destruction of other societies. So this thing of whether Bush—you know, it’s kind of become part of folklore—they lied us into the war in Iraq. But what you’re saying, and very clearly, the very idea of going to war in Iraq over the 9/11 incident, which not only did Saddam Hussein have–

**RG:** Nothing to do with.

**RS:** —nothing to do with, but actually he was opposed to Al-Qaeda, and it was the one country where Al-Qaeda could not operate in, was Iraq. But instead of going to war with Pakistan, or going to war, you know, elsewhere—no. We–

**RG:** Or Saudi Arabia.

**RS:** Well, of course, Saudi Arabia, where 15 of the 19 hijackers–

**RG:** Came from.

**RS:** —came from. You could actually make an argument to go into—hey, you attacked us, you supplied the money and so forth. No, we whitewashed the Saudi Arabia thing and went to war with Iraq. So your analogy, listeners should understand, is very precise. It is inventing an excuse, a defensive excuse, to engage an offensive invasion.

**RG:** Exactly. And from that spring all of these other kinds of crimes. So then I look at ordinary war crimes, and if you go over the Geneva Conventions and the various other laws of war, you
can see that there are a number of categories of crimes. Many of them have to do with failing to make the distinction between civilians and fighters, combatants. And of course the Bush-Cheney administration very early on decided to create a third, nonexistent category called unlawful combatants. But this designation doesn’t exist in the International Red Cross’s understanding; it doesn’t exist in the Geneva Convention’s. It was just a convenient way of saying this particular group of people, whoever it is that we choose to capture, detain forever, torture—they have no legal standing in the world. They exist outside of international law.

RS: So let me pick up on that also. And I don’t want to lose the earlier thread of the invention of war, and connecting with this incredibly important work you’ve done on torture. And you made the statement, which I think people should ponder: the reason we were torturing these people was not to get information about a future attack. We already had Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and everything, we knew everything about it, and so forth. The real reason for it was to invent an alibi for the invasion, to get somebody to say Saddam Hussein was backing them. And I think that’s a very important—a reason, by the way, to read your book, *Mainstreaming Torture*; let me give a plug here. But this other argument is also interesting, the whole idea of the noncombatant. And we are doing this interview at a time when Chelsea Manning, formerly Bradley Manning, is in prison—

RG: Yes.

RS: —again, because they want to fabricate a story about WikiLeaks and all that, and get everybody off the hook for all of the crimes and torture and everything they’ve done. But the interesting thing is, if you look at what did WikiLeaks—and they were just like in the position of the *Washington Post* with the Pentagon Papers, they’re the publisher—what did Chelsea Manning reveal? She revealed the death of noncombatants, including journalists. So why don’t you develop that a little bit, because that is so critical to the moment, that no one—one—no one has been prosecuted for those attacks that she revealed with the data. But she is now sitting in prison.

RG: And this is, of course—the fate of whistleblowers all over the world, and certainly in this country, is exactly that. That the matters that they have revealed disappear in a story that becomes about the crimes of the revealer. And of course in the war in Iraq, there was tremendous amounts of civilian death. And it falls into a number of categories; one category is those people who had actually been detained and were being held by U.S. forces. And for example at Abu Ghraib, we know—which is the prison outside of Baghdad that had been Saddam Hussein’s major torture site, and which the U.S. decided in its wisdom would be the
perfect place to hold detainees, and where we know a group of reservists ended up torturing people. But the real torture was going on upstairs, by the employees of various C.I.A. contractors, and by the C.I.A. itself. And that’s where people actually died. So there’s that whole category of people, but that’s a much smaller category than the category of ordinary civilians whose lives were either ended or destroyed by the regular U.S. use of warfare in places like Fallujah and other cities. So that we took what had been one of the most vibrant, developed, and cosmopolitan countries in that part of the world—which was Iraq—and we essentially did what they used to say they wanted to do to North Vietnam, bombed it back to the Stone Age. And so in just war theory, there are these rules about discriminating between combatants and noncombatants, and you are permitted a certain number of civilian deaths as long as they are side effects of your attempt to go after some legitimate military target. And this is called collateral damage; it’s, collateral means on the side, right? But in fact, in Iraq, we don’t know because there are many different counts, but anywhere between 500,000 and a million people have died in the U.S. invasion and occupation in Iraq. And when you lay that against the 3,000 people who died on September 11th, none of whom were killed by anyone even from Iraq, you also see that we have violated another rule of just war theory, which is proportionality. We have destroyed human life out of all proportion.

RS: And let me just—you know, it’s so difficult to grapple with these questions. And you are teaching at one of the major Catholic universities here.

RG: It’s a Jesuit university, and that’s a little different. And these are the left-wing Jesuits.

RS: I’m not putting down your school. [Laughter] Hey, I teach ethics at the University of Southern California–

RG: Enough said.

RS: —and clearly, yes, we are ethically challenged at this moment. I was about to actually celebrate the pope in this regard. And so there is a certain necessity for being consistent in the application of these principles, or they mean nothing.

RG: Exactly.
RS: And I think that’s the body of your life’s work, to remind us of that. So in a sense, you are at a good place where you’re teaching. I’m just wondering, how is this disregarded so widely? I mean, people make a big deal about don’t kill the unborn child. You know, I could see arguments about that. But if that’s the beginning of a consistent, pro-life position, yes, it makes certain sense. If it’s the end of a pro-life position, and then you end welfare and you don’t care what happens to the baby and so forth, you’re into a deep immorality. And it seems to me you’re at a very interesting place. Because for better or worse, this pope seems to be the only one able to challenge, let’s call it U.S. imperialism or imperial ventures, on a moral basis.

RG: I think that’s right. He certainly is doing a better job of that than either of his last two predecessors.

RS: Or the major–

RG: Other major, yeah. No, I think that’s right. And I think, you know, it’s interesting that at USF, we have Reserve Officers’ Training Corps. We have people who are training to be second lieutenants when they leave university in the U.S. Army. And I have had students tell me, I had a student from Guam who told me, you know, Professor Gordon, I know that when they send me to basic training, they’re going to try to take me apart and change me from being a person into being a soldier. And I just want you to know that I’m not going to let them do that to me. He said, but you know, ROTC was my ticket off the island, and I have a duty now to follow through with my promise. And I just, my heart broke for him. Because what they do to you in basic training is actually a slightly lighter version of what they do when they train torturers. Everyone who becomes a torturer—and people don’t just torture on a whim; people are trained to be torturers. And part of that training involves being brutalized first yourself, and having survived that ordeal, you emerge with this sense of yourself as an elite person who therefore has the right, as a superior being, and now the skills, to turn around and abuse and torture people who come along behind you. And the U.S. has its own methods of training, and its own locations where this happens.

RS: [omission for station break] I’m back after our break with Professor and Doctor Rebecca Gordon. And we were just talking about how we train people to be torturers. And this is fascinating, because if you don’t consider this question, that you’re getting basically good people to do horrible things, you’re missing the whole point. But I just want to say something about the good German. Because the basic appeal of Hitler was the solid—you know, he was going to make Germany great again. And this is, I’m not demonizing Germans here, but
Donald Trump’s father was obviously familiar with this in his lineage, in that tradition. And the whole appeal, even though this dictator Hitler was this funny-looking guy, hardly the Aryan model—was to a notion of order. And even in the concentration camps, keeping direct bookkeeping of how many teeth you pulled and gold you found in the teeth, and so forth. But it’s not—manners. They had the manners. And what bothers me about the very simplistic Trumpwashing that we’re going through now, that Trump is uniquely evil—it’s all about manners. He’s crude, he’s boorish, he’s a misogynist, he says these things, he does these things, he grabs people’s private parts, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. That’s not his crime. His crime is he’s continuing a tradition of bombing people who we have no right to bomb. And so I want to push this a little bit more, the whole question of manners. Because what Nuremberg did is unmask the manners. And this was also true in the Eichmann trial that Hannah Arendt talked about, when she talked about the banality of evil. Evil can be masked by manners. Smile while you learn to kill, right?

RS: A man of impeccable manners. Barack Obama. I even feel that way about Bill Clinton. When Bill Clinton’s on television, I smile. I like him. He’s warm, he’s encouraging. And then I forget, he’s the guy that ended the welfare system, for example. Yes.

RG: Exactly. Exactly right. And you know, Trump is now with his, I don’t know if you’ve taken a look at his so-called budget, but he’s planning to take away our Medicare and Medicaid, just in case you might have wanted to have healthcare. Obviously, that’s dead on arrival. But nonetheless, the point is that he is masking what he is actually doing by distracting us with this bombastic display. And in fact, one of his officials in the EPA actually recently said exactly that, that they’ve been able to make all these regulatory changes because every time it looks as though the press is going to notice, Trump fires off a tweet, and everybody’s like, ooh, shiny!
RS: This is a really important point. Because if you look at the Nuremberg Trial or you look at the Eichmann trial, these people all hid behind manners. They were well spoken, they were well educated, and they were following a Charlie Chaplinesque figure, a ludicrous figure; Hitler was certainly a, yes, he was a more ludicrous figure than Trump, in terms of manners and style and everything. But his popularity was largely based on being a sort of comic figure, in a way. He inspired a whole nation of logical, scientific, well-educated—probably the best-educated population in the world. And so I’ve had this experience, I’ve talked to people in the business community and they say well, you know, but Trump is good for business. And we did have a mess before, and then look at what’s happened to unemployment, and so forth and so on. And so we are really at the limit of manners as a guide. And that’s really what Nuremberg is about. Nuremberg was unmasking manners. Now, we didn’t continue after that; we had the brief Eichmann trial. But what we didn’t really ever do in this country—and this is why I want people to listen or to read your book, better to read it, although listening is great—we never really took apart the Nazi experience. Because we wanted the ex-Nazis and other Germans to be our allies in the Cold War. So we have never had that investigation of how an incredibly well-educated, Christian, law-and-order nation goes into madness.

RG: Not only that, we never did what the next step was supposed to be, which is establish a venue in which U.S. war crimes could also be examined in World War II. And there were a number of people who developed the Nuremberg principles, and worked on the original trial, who really honestly believed that this would be the prelude to establishing an international court for trying offenses committed during war, and expected that the United States would in fact be held accountable, not only for the firebombing of German cities, but for the destruction of up to 60 Japanese cities which were constructed of wood and paper and reduced to ashes, in a campaign that really very few people in this country even know about. Although Robert McNamara actually describes it in that excellent documentary—

RS: *The Fog of War*, yeah.

RG: —*The Fog of War*.

RS: And it’s excellent because you see that McNamara was involved in designing the bombing of Japan and Germany. But also, I mean—like, we talk about Korea. Oh, North Korea, animals, and Kim Il-sung and his progeny—nobody I ever run into knows we leveled every single structure in North Korea during the Korean War. Again, a war that was not needed; it was an attempt to get a Chinese communist who had come to power the year before. I mean, it’s bizarre. Then you look at what we did to North Vietnam, and the carpet bombing, and everything. So this is critical. American exceptionalism—I’ve mentioned this a number of times
on this podcast—to my mind, is a really, it's the most profound problem that American people have to face.

**RG:** It's a vicious idea. And it's been taken up in different ways by both the liberal democratic world, and by the, you know, the hard right in this country. The idea that by definition, the United States can do no wrong, because we are the leader of the so-called free world. Which is a locution I don’t even understand anymore, given that we're not competing anymore with the unfree communist world that supposedly we were in opposition to. But the idea—that—and this was the argument, actually, that the Bush administration made about torture. By definition, the United States is a country that does not torture. Therefore, whatever it is that you are observing, it cannot be torture, because that would be a logical contradiction, because we are the nation that doesn't do that. And it's almost impossible to enter into that understanding of the world, because no amount of evidence that you can present to the person who believes that is going to break that worldview. And so American exceptionalism allows us not only to have military bases in over 100 countries around the world; not only to conduct secret wars that the people in this country don’t even know about—we just suddenly woke up and said, oh my gosh, we're having a war in Somalia! Who knew. And not to mention Yemen—I was very heartened to see that the Senate had actually voted with the House to reprimand the U.S. alliance with Saudi Arabia in Yemen. But leave that aside. This whole idea that we are a unique bearer of human rights and democracy in the world—it's very hard to break, because it's a concealed, hermetically sealed worldview that people imbibe in grade school. And they imbibe it as they grow up, and it takes a lot of effort to break through. And one of the sad things that I see, especially with younger people that I've worked with in organizations like War Times/Tiempo de Guerras, is that once you've broken through, it then becomes very hard to imagine that the United States is not permanently and always going to be the hegemon. It almost, having made the effort and understood the danger the U.S. actually presents to the world, it becomes almost impossible to recognize when the U.S. actually loses one. And I think it’s very important we claim our victories.

**RS:** Well you know, you hit it clearly with this, the abandonment by the Democratic Party of any serious oppositional role. [With] control of the House now, there should be hearings about what are we doing in these different countries. And instead they’re actually criticizing Trump for being, kind of selling out by getting out of Afghanistan, or not fighting more aggressively in Syria. And we've actually sort of lost the peace movement, in a way, is a theme I get back to once in a while here. And we forget, actually, most of the terrible wars since World War II have been fought under democrats, and financed enthusiastically. So I want to get back to basic moral principles, because they don’t mean anything if you’re not consistent. You have to call out people on the left or on the right, you have to call out war crimes, you have to call out the attacks on homosexuals, black people, Jewish people—anybody, any other, and so forth. It's something that Jesus reminded us of in the tale of the Good Samaritan, if you can believe that Luke is the word of God, and not the others, [Laughter] where the Good Samaritan doesn’t appear. I don’t want to get into your whole Catholic university thing here. But it’s interesting to
me, this notion of consistency. Because it’s painful to be consistent. It requires examining the motives of people you voted for. And this was the problem of Germany: people forget Hitler was elected. People forget Germany had all the trappings of a–

RG: Of a democracy.

RS: --of a democracy. And more important, the conceit that somehow education—education, and manners—will prevent genocide is a lie. Maybe it’s time to recognize this whole notion of American greatness is the end of thought; if you are by definition great, there’s nothing to question. And it seems to me that main religions that we’ve had, their one demand that they have in common is you must question not only your nation’s morality, but your own. The devil is in you. We have to struggle with this devil, we have to struggle with these forces. Yet as a nation, we think America the beautiful absolves us all. And that’s what you’re saying in your torture book. That basically, you take these young recruits that have a very limited knowledge of our history, and you convince them that they are the agents, really, of a higher power.

RG: Absolutely right. And in doing that, you pervert the very virtues that we say the United States is supposed to represent. The virtue of courage, for example, becomes the courage to suppress your squeamishness at causing pain to another human being. And justice becomes the idea that you give the punishment first and the trial later, if ever. Right? And this is exactly what we see in the way our detainees have been treated. And honestly, another locus of this that we don’t often recognize is what goes on on the U.S. soil prisons and jails in this country, where we have 2.2 million people locked up in cages, and where torture is a regular feature of prison life. It’s no accident that the reservists who were downstairs at Abu Ghraib, they were from West Virginia, and most of them in their civilian life were prison guards. They were corrections officers. And there’s a famous email that one of the ringleaders, Charles Graner, sent home which said: The Christian in me knows it’s wrong, but the corrections officer in me loves to see a grown man piss himself. And that is exactly the attitude of the people who are caging up 2.2 [million] largely, vastly disproportionately, black and Latino, Latinx, people in this country today. And so torture actually is a red thread that runs through the entire history of the United States, beginning with the Native American population. Slavery itself would not have been as successful as it was at allowing the amassing of capital—which is, you know if you’re a good Marxist, the congealed labor of these unpaid, captive people, who when they got to the United States, or what was not even yet the United States, would not work unless the farmers figured out, they were caused physical pain. And it was the use, the concerted, intentional, well-documented use of physical pain in the cotton fields a century later that forced people to develop a physical technology of their bodies that allowed them, in the course of 40 years, to multiply by eight times the amount of cotton a human being could pick in a day, because the alternative was to have the skin taken off your back with a whip.
RS: You know, increasingly in my life I have been a bad Marxist. And I've embraced some truths that seemed to come out of these religions that, growing up, really frightened me or were intimidating, and also were on the wrong side. But let's take it back to the pope, let's take it back to the Jesuit school, University of San Francisco, where you teach. There's a wisdom that I daresay Karl Marx did not sufficiently embrace. It is that we all have a capacity for evil. That we have virtue; we care, we bring children into this world, we nurture them, we care about others, we can cry over a refugee. On the other hand, the 2.2 million— I've been on Death Row quite recently interviewing Kevin Cooper, who I believe is an innocent man. And fortunately, the governor of California has suspended the death penalty, and I think Gavin Newsom deserves great credit for his courage. But—and it is a cage, and we don't care; we don't care about these people. And we don't care about the people we bomb, and we don't care—they're expendable, they're throwaway people. You want them out of sight, out of mind. It's very deliberate. And the problem is, if Marxism were accurate [Laughter]—I don't know, not too many people care, anyway, but since the two of us are talking about it—you know, if it was just the economic motive, we'd probably do better. The libertarians, for instance—to the degree that they're right, they're right, yes. But the wars don't make sense. And growing that cotton that way didn't ultimately make sense. And slavery didn't make sense. Except—except if we have a barbaric part of our nature, if we have a need to exploit others. Not just for economic reasons; if power corrupts. And this, not to quote Marx, but to quote Jefferson or Washington, these people who came to power in this great experiment of ours, with all its contradictions—I repeat this ad nauseum on these podcasts. All their, yes, white, male, I got it, I got it, slave owners, the whole thing—they were on to a wisdom about their own corruption. And the reason we have the First Amendment, the reason we have all the amendments, the reason we have separation of powers, is that power corrupts.

RG: Absolutely.

RS: And what comes through in these torture stories and so forth—I talked, I have one student, just like you, I've had students go off to these wars. I had one who ended up at Abu Ghraib and at Guantanamo, a reserve officer. He was outside with the families. I'm not going to compromise his privacy. But he told me what shook him up was he was being told all these things about the people inside the jail, but his job was to herd the families that were trying to visit. And he could not deny that there was some kind of humanity going on with these people inside, or why would all these people care so much about them. And I think we need to be reminded of our own capacity for evil. I think that's what Nuremberg was about, that the people who commit evil don't present as evil and are not inherently more evil than we are.

RG: Exactly.
RS: And we have to struggle with this. And the good liberals who accommodate this, and say well, you know, Barack Obama had to do this with the drones, and governor so-and-so had to kill these people even though he didn’t believe in the death penalty—we have to challenge that. Because that is the fount of evil.

RG: So, my favorite virtue, Aristotle calls it phronesis, or practical wisdom. St. Thomas Aquinas calls it prudentia, prudence. But what it really is, is that capacity of the mind that allows you to actually understand the moral questions that are in front of you. And not to be fooled by the fog of American exceptionalism, by the distraction of a Trumpian tweet, but to be able to actually examine and really see, in this case, the effects of U.S. policy on actual human beings around the world. And this requires a kind of courage to be willing to accept that your own self-understanding, and the understanding of your people, your country, might be wrong. But it also requires a willingness to look, to actually see and examine what’s in front of you. And if there’s one virtue I would like to see developed, and that I try to develop in my own students, it’s this virtue of practical wisdom, where you actually are responsible for what the effects of your actions can reasonably be foreseen to be. And this is something that we in the United States really don’t have. It’s trained out of us, we don’t have it. And part of it, yes, is that capacity to understand that the ability to do evil things exists in all of us, and it’s also to understand that when you multiply that capacity by the technological and economic power that a country like the United States has, the results—well, the results could be the end of human society, because of climate change. I mean, the results are so terrible, and we need to be able to see it. Because we can’t stop it if we can’t understand it, we can’t diagnose it. And I worry that we’re not going to be able to.

RS: If you could learn about Aristotle in this way we just did for a few minutes, and why some of these older thinkers matter, that was it. And I do want to say, we’ve smashed America a little bit here. And I think the great thing about America is that it could produce generals like George Washington, who warned us about the impostures of pretended patriotism; generals like Dwight Eisenhower, who warned us about the military-industrial complex; and a guy named Major Danny Sjursen, who I’ve had on this podcast, who writes for Truthdig, who now comes out of the military and tells us that the barbarism in Iraq and Afghanistan is comparable to these dangers that were warned against. So that’s Rebecca Gordon. She teaches at the University of San Francisco. Her books are Mainstreaming Torture and American Nuremberg. That’s it for this edition of Scheer Intelligence. Our engineers at KCRW are Mario Diaz and Kat Yore. Our producers are Joshua Scheer and Isabel Carreon. And we couldn’t have done this broadcast without the able assistance of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley, where [name unclear] presided over these proceedings. Thank you very much.
RG: Thank you, it was a pleasure.