

The Extraterrestrial Terran Observer

Imagine a UFO or another planet observing us with their extra high-tech audio and visual telescopes and other such devices (in other words, imagine they are our own U.S. government, only with slightly more powerful eavesdropping devices). When they examine the actions we as a culture and as a world are engaging in at this point in time, and the oppression and even brutality involved in such actions, they would have to wonder about us, to say the least. If they compared our actions to our stated values and principles, they would no doubt be alarmed as well, and would almost certainly be loath to meet us.

What would they see if they were watching us today? Here is a very small representative sample: the U.S. has killed between 100,000 and 1.3 million innocent civilians in Iraq; the majority of people in America, the land of opportunity, make on average \$29,000 a year, while their top corporate executives make roughly \$20 million a year, with many more millions in stock options and bonuses; the Constitution of the U.S. was assaulted by a Republican president (via things like signing statements and warrantless spying on citizens, and refusal to follow laws passed by Congress, such as whistle-blower protection), and a compliant Congress, and the media and populace ignored it; more and more taxpayer money giveaways are being presented to corporations who were given power to write laws for themselves, but not for the people; human and civil rights have been diminished to the point of evaporation, with such measures as the USA PATRIOT Act, the use of torture, extraordinary rendition, rejection of habeas corpus, etc.; increasing use of technology to invade the private lives of citizens (such as use of RF chips read without the possessor knowing or approving of it, warrantless tapping of phones, emails, etc.); a new president who supports full immunity from prosecution for torturers, lawbreakers, and corporations that spy on people; the people at large are busy watching *American Idol* and the Brad and Angelina follies rather than fixating on a problem that is breaking them down as persons and making their lives far more difficult than if they kept informed about this scenario. Perhaps most importantly, by all accounts the earth is dying, yet the lion's share of U.S. taxpayer money goes into the military budget to spread violence and oppression, and environmental degradation, while virtually no research can be done on alternatives to the fossil-fuel dependence of civilization.

Upon seeing all this, the alien spectators would have to ask themselves: "What kinds of beliefs do these beings proclaim that enable and justify such actions?" As they began to read through our stated collective *raison d'être* over the ages, they would find such proclamations as the following. We call them our great documents. Although these documents span more than two millennia, they hold at least two things in common: they put increasing limits on the authority of rulers, and they announce ethical precepts related to such limits that view human persons as worthy of respect, not to be oppressed by either ruler or fellow citizen. Today we would translate their specific prohibitions into terms like "equality of all," "common good," "dignity of the person," along with "limits on executive, judicial, and/or legislative power." Although many were written long ago, what we would call the principles that motivated them, which lie underneath them, are still valid today. In fact, humanity has refined, not abandoned these principles over time. Our alien watchers would see that now these principles that have limited governments and protected persons, whose insights have been brought forward from generation to generation, are now being ignored and violated with rigorous consistency.

If our E.T. observers look to the Mideast, long ago the **Code of Hammurabi**, for instance, placed strict limits on government power over people. It says, for example, "If any one ensnares another, putting a ban upon him, but he cannot prove it, then he that ensnared him shall be put to death." Our visitors might well wonder whether the member of the Bush administration and Obama himself be willing to continue this precept: that if they arrest but cannot make their case, should not *they* be the ones to be

tried? Our interstellar voyeurs would likely read this in the context of indefinite detention of prisoners in Guantanamo; Abu Grhaib; Bagram prisons, and wonder what happened to this valuable, person-protecting principle (see Glenn Greenwald, "Obama's Civil Liberties Speech," *Salon.com*, May 21, 2009).

Further, says Hammurabi, "If a judge try a case, reach a decision, and present his judgment in writing; if later error shall appear in his decision, and it be through his own fault, then he shall pay twelve times the fine set by him in the case, and he shall be publicly removed from the judge's bench, and never again shall he sit there to render judgment." Under this code of moral and professional judiciary conduct, Jay Bybee, the Bush-appointed federal judge who approved of the torture of prisoners, should be removed from the bench. Yet Obama continues to protect Bybee, John Yoo, Alberto Gonzales, and other members of the Bush administration who crafted legal opinions condoning torture (see Laria Alexandrovna, "Obama Justice Department Continues to Cover up Bush-Era Crimes").

A little further to the east, the **Code of Manu** commanded that persons "Wound not others, do no one injury by thought or deed, utter no word to pain thy fellow creatures," and also that "one should speak the truth." Then our observers would wonder how the U.S. can justify the slaughter of between 100,000 and 1.3 million innocent persons in Iraq (*Project Censored 2010* deals with this issue in some detail, with conclusive documentation for the latter number being more accurate). Further, they would have to question a government that consistently lies to its people, and now lies about the economic situation (e.g. the consumer price index now means nothing, with government rigging its figures) and how the mess is best fixed (keep giving money to the wealthy. See, for example, William Greider, "Obama's Weird Idea of Auto Industry Rescue: Use Our Money to Build Car Factories Abroad," *The Nation*, May, 2009)). Again, they would have to wonder how and why a man like Dick Cheney continues to be given so much fawning attention by media and others in society, when he has consistently violated every ethical principle known to humanity, beginning with these held by Manu (see, for the latest documentation of this assertion, Jonathan S. Landay and Warren P. Stobel, "Cheney's Speech Contained Omissions, Misstatements," *Yahoo News*, May 21, 2009).

Looking to the west, our visitors would likely read the **Magna Carta**, in which the right of *habeas corpus* and *due process* are articulated, as are other judicial rights for persons detained by the crown. These are the very foundation human and civil rights that Bush and the compliant Congress undercut in 2001 with the USA PATRIOT Act, and that the Obama administration continues today (for just one example, see Glenn Greenwald, "The Obama Administration Fights Harder for the Power to Abduct People and Imprison Them With No Charges," *Salon.com*, April 11, 2009). The Magna Carta also condemns usury as abusive to persons, yet it is a common practice by American businesses today, which is a direct contributor to the social inequality from which the Carta attempts to lift people.

In addition, as the sense of personhood grew and the sense of benign monarchy diminished, the **English Bill of Rights (1689)** was crafted. In it, the principle of the rule of law, stating as it does that the law applies even to the rulers, was given precise formulation: "That the pretended power of dispensing with laws or the execution of laws by regal authority, as it hath been assumed and exercised of late, is illegal." Our watchers would no doubt wonder how it is that such a valuable principle, carried forward into generations subsequent to the one which formulated this bill, comes to be ignored wholesale by rulers, and no one holds them accountable to it. They would have to wonder not only about Bush actions, but about how and why Obama continues to shield the Bush practitioners from violating this principle by ignoring and refusing to follow laws, and why Obama shields telecommunication companies from having the law applied to them for their misdeeds of spying on innocent American citizens as well (see Sibel Edmonds, "Two Sides of the Same Coin: Heads-Heads," *CommonDreams.org*, May 23, 2009).

There are yet other such principles that have been brought forward from this 17th-century document. For example, "That the raising or keeping a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace, unless it be with consent of Parliament, is against law." Now we have not only armies, but mercenary armies such as Blackwater/Xe, and also mechanized armies attacking people who are living peacefully, by predator drones (see James Petras, "Obama's Animal Farm," *Information Clearing House*, May 18, 2009).

Another such principle states "that the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament." Americans use this principle in their First Amendment, and yet today, those who speak truth to power are called "traitors" and/or "unpatriotic" by members of its own government, in particular by those in the Republican Party. Even now, there are legislators calling for military attacks on journalists who expose information they do not wish exposed from their wars of conquest and oppression (see, for example, Jeremy Scahill, "Neocon Group Calls for Military Strikes on Media," *Antiwar.com*, May 21, 2009). "How did such a principle get lost in the translation to the current generation of politicians?" our E.T. viewers might ask.

Another limitation on government and pro-person principle brought forward from this era states "That excessive bail ought not to be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted" Yet, we know now that Americans torture and detain without charge, and have for ages (see Alfred McCoy, *A Question of Torture*. For the latest, see the hour-long interview with torture experts Jane Mayer and Philippe Sands on *Democracy Now!* May 20, 2009). Have we really remained the barbarians away from whom these documents were designed to lift us?

One hundred years later, another generation continued the practice of principled limiting of government power and widening respect for human persons. It appeared **French Declaration of Rights (1789)**, which stated most clearly yet, perhaps, the relation of government to the people, and who had what rights. For example, it asserted that "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good." And yet, there are more and more giveaways to wealthy people and companies, and the CEO's taking roughly \$20 million in pay with bonuses added to that, while the average American worker has seen their salary drop to around \$29,000 a year (see, for one example, Andy Kroll, "The Greatest Swindle Ever Sold," *TomDispatch.com*, May 26, 2009).

Again, "The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression." Today though, these rights mean nothing, subject to their erosion under legislation like the USA PATRIOT Act, use of torture, "extraordinary rendition," rejection of habeas corpus and due process rights, overriding the right to privacy of citizens by using increasing technological prowess to monitor individual citizen speech and movements.

Another great principle carried forward from the past and into this generation states that "As all persons are held innocent until they shall have been declared guilty, if arrest shall be deemed indispensable, all harshness not essential to the securing of the prisoner's person shall be severely repressed by law." And yet, again, we torture and routinely deny this right to people.

Further, "No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law." Yet today, American citizens are subject to arrest for expressing their free speech rights at conventions and in public generally, such as the arrest on charges of "terrorism," for chalking the sidewalk, chanting, and leafleting against biomedical researchers (I am referring here to the so-called AETA 4).

11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law. Yet, in the forthcoming *Project Censored 2010* book, authors Peter Phillips and Mickey Huff argue convincingly that we are facing a “truth emergency” due to media complicity in U.S. government crimes against not only Iraqis, but against their own citizens. Alternative opinions and indeed information itself, argue Phillips and Huff, is being kept from the people, and what is reported is heavily edited and slanted toward the interests of those in power. In the meantime, say the authors, the people suffer with declining wages with no understanding of why it is happening. Huff and Phillips answer that question in their forthcoming chapter.

13. A common contribution is essential for the maintenance of the public forces and for the cost of administration. This should be equitably distributed among all the citizens in proportion to their means. Yet, corporations are not taxed, the taxes of the wealthy have decreased over the past thirty years, and the major economic players in the country are given trillions of dollars to put in their pockets while at the same time they refuse to put into the kitty for the common good.

We can easily see that the **U.S. Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights** did not appear out of nowhere; they were part of a long history of limiting government power and increasing individual independence. Some of the principles that we have already examined bear repeating here: that all are created equal, and that all should be given the political space to pursue life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that a government of, by, and for the people shall not perish from the face of the earth; that all persons have the right to speak their minds as they see fit in public discourse, and have a right not to have their government intrude on their private lives. These principles have a long and cherished history, and they are precisely the ones that the U.S. is putting asunder today.

The principles we have examined reached their apotheosis in the **U.N. Universal Declaration of HR**, which took the historical principles we have seen that were culture and age-specific, and raised them to the universal level they were implied to have in our historical affirmations of them:

Article 1--All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2--Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3--Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4--No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms. Again, read this in the context of corporate bailouts and bonuses by the U.S. taxpayer, while their real wages continue to decline while services are being cut when they become needful of them.

Article 5--No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Again, read this in the context of the torture the U.S. engages in at Guantanamo and Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan. Jeremy Scahill has just presented compelling evidence that this

continues to this day at Guantanamo (“Little Known Military Thug Squad Still Brutalizing Prisoners at Gitmo Under Obama,” *AlterNet*, May 15, 2009).

Article 6--Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law. Have we said “Guantanamo” enough, yet?

Article 29--(1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. Have we said “corporate bailouts” and “reduced taxes for the wealthy” enough, yet?

When the extraterrestrial observer recognizes all this—torture, indefinite retentions without charge, renditions, corporate bailouts and bonuses, reduced taxes for the wealthy, spying on citizens, immunity for lawbreaking leaders, squelching of the speech of opposition voices, violations of the rule of law, war crimes by leaders, human and civil rights dissolution by legislation, by refusing to enforce the laws, and refusal to prosecute those who leaders who break the law, etc., etc.—they would have to scratch their heads (or whatever they called the part of their anatomy that houses their brains): “How can any race consistently proclaim such lofty values and yet even more consistently act against those values and still hope to survive as a species? Their very planet is in peril as a result of these actions, as well as nations and peoples, and all they can do is engage in oppression and violence against each other and against their planet. Maybe we should remind them of what they claim their values are. After all, at least in their written words they seem to acknowledge those values as integral to their continued co-existence and prosperity. Yet, as a race, their actions show that they sure don’t even esteem those values anymore. Shall we save them from themselves? Oh, but this darned non-interference directive keeps us from doing that. So we will just watch and hope they wake up before it is too late.”

Thus it would be that their observation of the extreme gap between our historical proclamations of our values and our actions, in addition to our lack of interest in their widespread and massive violations today by our own culture and government, would have to cause our Terran observers bewilderment, if not downright concern for the survival and co-existence of such an interesting array of creatures and cultures. How could they not help but conclude that humans seem determined to terrorize each other and the planet they live on to the point where mass extermination is now an actual possibility, even as the values humans have proclaimed on paper in our great documents lie rotting in an oversized garbage heap just outside our city limits.