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THEY SAID IT

Mother Courage: "That must be a rotten general."

The Cook: "He's ravenous all right, but why rotten?"

Mother Courage: "Because he's got to have men of courage, that's why. If he knew how to plan a proper campaign what would he be needing men of courage for? Ordinary ones would do. It's always the same; whenever there's a load of special virtues around it means something stinks"

The Cook: "I thought it meant things is all right.

Mother Courage: No, that they stink. Look, s'pose some general or king is bone stupid and leads his men up shit creek, then those men've got to be fearless, there's another virtue for you. S'pose he's stingy and hires too few soldiers, then they got to be a crowd of Hercules's. And s'pose he's slapdash and don't give a bugger, then they got to be clever as monkeys else their number's up. Same way they got to show exceptional loyalty each time he gives them impossible jobs. Nowt but virtues no proper country and no decent king or general would ever need. In decent countries folk don't have to have virtues, the whole lot can be perfectly ordinary, average intelligence, and for all I know cowards."

Mother Courage and Her Children, Bertolt Brecht, 1939.

BEWARE WHEN DEMOCRATS SPEAK OF ETHICS.

As everyone knows by now, the new Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, has stated unequivocally that she intends to "lead the most honest, the most open, and the most ethical Congress in history." God bless her. We sincerely hope that she honors this pledge and that she will serve as a shining example for all future Speakers to follow for as long as the U.S. Congress exists.

Unfortunately, we must admit to skepticism. In fact, we worry when the likes of Nancy Pelosi promises levels of honesty and ethical behavior that surpass the ordinary. When she does that, she reminds us of Mother Courage's charge that something isn't right when "special virtues" are sought.

For starters, we wonder about the honesty of one who promises to induce the esteemed members of the lower House to become ethical giants, *en masse*, to individually and collectively shun the temporal excitements that have plagued humankind since that unfortunate incident in the garden. More importantly, we wonder to what purpose she wishes to perform this wizardry.

In this Issue

Beware When Democrats Speak
of Ethics.

Beware When Democrats Speak
of National Security.

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Like Mother Courage, we would rest easier if she would aver that ordinary, fallible men and women would be capable of navigating the shoals toward which she intends to lead them. For the pledge that the honorable lady has made is one that she cannot honor, not because of any failing on her part, but because she has little if any control over the ethical behavior of those whom she leads. No matter how hard she tries, or what means she employs, she cannot cleanse them of pride, envy, anger, avarice, gluttony, lust, and sloth, which give rise to the ethical transgressions that are the object of her crusade. In truth, any organization that has no role in choosing its members will have little control over the collective virtue of its membership.

If she is serious about promoting ethical behavior, we would suggest that she begin by conducting herself ethically. This concept has deep roots in Judeo-Christian teaching, but is generally considered by liberals to have been rendered obsolete by Bill Clinton's assertion that character, as traditionally defined, is not an essential quality of leadership. Nevertheless, she might give it a try.

She might also abandon her propensity to promote the interests of her sleazy friends, men such as Jack Murtha, Alcee Hastings, and John Conyers. In this regard, she might follow the example of Prince Hal, who, when promoted to the highest office in the land, abruptly abandoned his old pal Falstaff.

I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers
...
Presume not that I am the thing I was,
For God doth know, so shall the world
perceive,
That I have turned away from my former self;
So will I that kept me company.

Finally, she should use her new position of power to see to it that those who act unethically are punished according to the rules of the House, not out of anger, spite, or partisanship, but to send a message to other members and to aspiring initiates that that which she so fondly calls the "people's House" is not friendly

to shysters and sharpies. Although this suggestion has been around for a very long time, none of her predecessors of either party has ever tried it. So we would humbly propose that she do so.

Of course, Madam Pelosi knows all of this. In point of fact, her pledge to keep a clean House was, first and foremost, a backhanded way of restating one of the Democratic Party's principal themes during the last election, namely that the GOP is the most ethically challenged of the two parties.

Nevertheless, her promise to preside over the most ethical Congress in history was a curious one that raised, with us at least, a host of questions about her motives for publicly setting such a standard. Did she not consider the political problems attendant to making a bold promise concerning something over which she has little control? Did she thus set herself up to be discredited? Was her promise then a political *faux pas* of sorts?

We also wonder if she believes that success in this endeavor, were it even possible, would be worth the effort politically. Surely, she is aware that the American people are only marginally concerned about the behavior of their elected officials; that, like herself, a large majority of Americans today are quite capable of ignoring the most egregious ethical and moral transgressions by politicians they favor, while condemning most vigorously those whom they don't like for even minor incidences of bad conduct.

In fact, American history is replete with examples of politicians, from lowly county officials to some who occupied the highest office in the land, who were infamous in their day for immoral and corrupt practices, but who enjoyed widespread popularity and repeated elector successes. Certainly, she must know that the ranks of her soon-to-be-ethically-superior Congress contain a fair share of this species.

So what gives? Is there something else behind her decision to make ethics a centerpiece of her administration? We cannot know what lurks in the heart of Madam. Pelosi. But we can speculate. So here goes.

We will begin the discussion with the observation made recently by *Wall Street Journal* columnist Daniel Henninger that the ethics reforms proposed by Madam Pelosi have little or nothing to do with improving the honesty and integrity of the members of the House and all to do with curtailing the efforts of lobbyists to influence these members.

Once again, she eschews the Judeo-Christian approach, which teaches that self-discipline is an essential ingredient in virtue. Her solution is more in keeping with the Islamic tendency to blame the source of the temptation rather than the individual who succumbs to it. Hence, men are protected from the sin of lust by requiring women to cover themselves from head to toe, least the glimpse of a well turned ankle send them into rut.

The benefit of this approach, from the perspective of the liberal Madam Pelosi, is that it strongly enhances the power of the federal government at the expense of the private sector. We discussed this phenomena many times six years ago during the debate over Senator McCain's campaign finance reform legislation, which took the same approach. But in light of Madam Pelosi's apparent determination to revisit this travesty, we thought it would be worth restating the case we made then.

We will begin by noting the concept of the "iron triangle" or "sub-government" model of public policy that was popularized in the 1960s by Theodore Lowi, a demigod of American political science, in his classic 1969 book (revised in 1979), *The End of Liberalism*. In a nutshell, Lowi's thesis is that the triangular connections between special interests, legislators, and bureaucrats has rendered obsolete the old liberal-conservative dialogue that dominated American politics for so many years, slowly replacing it with a system he called "interest group liberalism."

Briefly stated, this sub-government/iron triangle theory describes a situation where interest groups throw money at legislators, who, in turn, lean on bureaucrats over whom they have oversight authority. Bureaucrats, for their part, seek to maximize their utility and their budgets by favoring those special

interests that are well represented by powerful legislators. They also restart the cycle over and over again by proposing an endless stream of regulations. These proposed regulations rankle special interests, who throw money at legislators . . . blah, blah, blah, *ad infinitum*.

Regardless of whether one likes or despises this system, it is nearly universally unquestioned that the "iron triangle" is the most important theoretical model for the study of public policy and administrative behavior in this nation, and that the empirical aspects of Lowi's model are accurate. In other words, the nexus between special interests, legislators, and bureaucrats is undeniable.

Now, when you consider this model closely, you realize that two sides of this "iron triangle" – the bureaucracy and the legislature – are liberal constructs, in that their interests are served by the accumulation of power within the federal establishment. It is worth noting here that in today's world of "interest group liberalism," even the so-called conservatives within the legislative branch are reliable advocates of ever larger and more powerful government.

The third side of this "iron triangle" is where ordinary citizens get most actively involved. Recognizing that individuals acting singly can have little influence on the system, citizens of like mind form into what have become known as "special interest groups," to promote and defend their shared belief or beliefs. In today's world, as Lowi notes, making "contributions" to politicians is integral to this exercise.

By curtailing the manner and means by which these special interest groups can attempt to influence the legislators – something referred to in the First Amendment to the Constitution as the right of the people "to petition the Government for a redress of grievances" – Pelosi's "reforms" would, just as McCain's already have, vastly increase the strength of the other two sides of the triangle, both of which, as we mentioned earlier, inherently favor a larger and ever more powerful government at the expense of the private sector.

Now it is true, as many people have pointed out, that the long and heated debate that will ensue if Madam Pelosi insists on making “ethics reform” a centerpiece of her agenda could become uncomfortable at times for Democrats, given, among other things, that two of the Party’s most esteemed and visible members, Bill and Hillary Clinton, are among the sleaziest politicians of the day. Indeed, there is little doubt that they would rank high on the list of the sleaziest in the entire last century.

But if there is a lesson for Democrats in the remarkable survival of the Clintons, besides the fact that the public can be highly forgiving of miscreants whom they like for other reasons, it is that the best defense against charges of moral and ethical turpitude is a good offense.

Of course, Bill and Hillary utilized all of the traditional defensive measures, including public declarations of innocence and perjury. But the key to their survival was a well-orchestrated offensive. This included a variety of standard means, including oppositional research via the use of a full time private detective firm and illicitly obtained FBI files; character assassination against, among others, Monica Lewinsky, Gennifer Flowers, and Paula Jones; and yes, phone calls warning that “the Clintons are vindictive” and that it might be wise to “write about something else.”

But the heart of their offense was two brilliant and unique ploys that are pertinent to this discussion. The first, an act of genius, was lumping their critics all together under the rubric of a “vast right wing conspiracy” and then charging that this collective was motivated solely by politics. This was largely successful in shifting the debate out of the arena of moral and ethical considerations, where the Clinton’s didn’t have a chance, and onto political grounds, where they were in their element and the mainstream press could justify defending them.

The second, equally brilliant ploy was to press the Nietzschean case that the Clintons live at a level of experience that is above traditional measures of good and evil; that while conventional standards of behavior

are appropriate for ordinary men and women, they should not be allowed to hinder the work of folks like themselves, avatars of all that is good, who have a special capacity for “caring,” and a lifelong dedication to the task of harnessing the power of government to improve the world.

Bill once described this belief to Tom Brokaw, when he claimed that “character,” at least in his case, is demonstrated “most effectively” not by what you do in your personal life but by “what you fight for and for whom you fight.” Hillary anticipated this demand for an exemption from the customary rules of behavior when she described her “Maid of Orleans” uniqueness to the Washington Post by claiming she has a “burning desire to make the world around me – kind of going out in concentric circles – better for everybody.”

Today, the extraordinary success of these two offensive approaches to defense can be witnessed in the fact that any suggestions that Hillary is not fit to be President of the United States is immediately regarded by a large number of Americans and much of the media as a political statement rather than a practical, apolitical observation about the wisdom of having a deeply dishonest individual occupy the highest office of the land.

And this is why a national discussion about ethics in government, during this time when every issue is viewed from a political perspective, will very likely further the cause of liberalism rather than impede it. For such a debate will, just as the Clinton presidency did, subject those traditional customs, social norms, and ethical values, which have been an integral part of the American culture since the nation’s founding, to the withering process of sophistic debate and, in the end, convince more and more Americans that the values upon which the United States was founded and that have helped to make it the great nation that it is, are, as Nietzsche said, nothing more than a means by which the powerful keep them from sating their various appetites and keep Hillary from accomplishing her burning desire to create a better world for everyone via government.

BEWARE WHEN DEMOCRATS SPEAK OF NATIONAL SECURITY.

Of all the arguments put forth by disgruntled conservatives during last fall's dreadful midterm campaign, the least persuasive and most aggravating was the claim that Republicans not only deserved to lose but that it would make no difference if they did, since the distinctions between the two parties have become so negligible as not to matter.

According to this crowd, Republicans today spend as much, if not more than the Democrats, waffle as badly on important issues, and believe just as deeply in the power of government to solve every little problem, etc., etc., etc. So why not just sit out the election and let the GOP receive the drubbing it so richly deserves? What difference does it make?

Oddly, enough, conservatives were not alone in this lamentation. The same sentiment was expressed on the other side of the aisle by many liberals, who hammered their fellow Democrats for being too much like the other guys. Indeed, this complaint has been one of the driving forces behind the angrier and more disillusioned factions of the left wing of the Democratic Party since at least the 2004 presidential campaign, during which Howard Dean's supporters and other leftists reprised the old Barry Goldwater line from 1964 and demanded "a choice, not an echo."

Of course, even before then, many liberals were complaining bitterly that their party had evolved into something indistinguishable from the GOP. After a decade-and-a-half of Democratic "centrism," under the auspices of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) and Bill Clinton, many liberals were palpably frustrated. So deeply ingrained was the belief that the Clinton-era Democrats had morphed into the "Republican-lite" party that no less a luminary in the study of politics than Theodore Lowi, the godfather of American political science, actually referred to Clinton as the last of the great "Republican" presidents, the man who put the finishing touches on the agenda begun by Ronald Reagan and sustained by George H. W. Bush.

Now, that's all well and good, we suppose, except for the fact that it is also fatuous drivel. The fact is that the similarities between the parties are largely superficial. Certainly, today's GOP holds a great deal of the ideological ground once held by the Democratic Party, having filled the vacuum that was left behind when the New Deal coalition collapsed, intellectually and politically. And, at the same time, the Democratic Party has, in some ways, emulated the GOP in an effort to remain competitive electorally. But there are still vast, important, *fundamental* differences between the parties, superficial resemblances notwithstanding.

Long-time readers – or even readers of the first piece in today's newsletter – will know that we believe that one of the most essential differences between the left and the right in this nation is their contrary understandings of the concepts of good and evil and their resultant divergent conceptions of what constitutes moral behavior. We described this clash of moral codes in detail nearly a decade ago in an April 1998 article titled "Let the Big Dog Run."

One side in this conflict can be described as traditional Judeo-Christian. The foundation of this belief system was established some 3,300 years ago with the receipt of the Decalogue by Moses at Mt. Sinai.

Besides Old and New Testament teachings, interpreted and clarified by such scholars as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, who integrated Platonic and Aristotelian concepts respectively, this system embraces a host of traditions, customs and mores that developed in Western society over many centuries. It is supported by a rich heritage of art and literature, and historic struggles, both religious and secular. The twin concepts of "sin" and "truth" help bind this system together.

The opposing system espouses beliefs that are often referred to today as "post-modern." This system is roughly based on the concept that there are no ultimate,

overarching truths, and that judgments about right and wrong are little more than the means by which some people control others, or as Nietzsche, an icon of the movement, put it, the outward expressions of will and power.

As should be obvious, we got to thinking about the clash of moral systems again last week, as we watched the Democrats draw back the curtain on their new majority. Madame Pelosi and company went quickly and loudly about the task of righting all the “wrongs” perpetrated upon humanity in the twelve-year Republican captivity, addressing such pressing global issues as the minimum wage, student loans, and price controls for prescription drugs. But the real measure of the differences between the parties was far more subtly in evidence.

In one of the very first acts of the 110th Congress, the Democrat-led House passed HR1, “The Implementing the 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007.” The bill sounds innocuous enough. And those provisions that aren’t harmless are intended primarily to have a political effect, i.e., to vilify President Bush for ignoring “the experts” or to placate Democratic pressure groups. But there is at least one provision that is very troubling and highly indicative of another vast and important difference between the two parties, which could ultimately decide the future of the United States. We are referring to an “instruction” in the bill to “expand and strengthen the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI),” by, among other things, authorizing it under international law under the auspices of the United Nations Security Council.

Now it is debatable whether, as security matters go, this is not the most important provision in the bill, or the most important initiative ever introduced. But what is not debatable is the symbolism at play in the effort to place at least some aspects of the global war on terror under the direction and authorization of the United Nations.

If this were merely a swipe at President Bush, a declaration of no confidence in his ability to advance security initiatives without the some grown-up

supervision, we would be inclined to ignore it. But it is not. Rather, it is a deliberate effort to involve the United Nations in American security policy and thus to declare the “war on terror” the legitimate province of Turtle Bay.

Among the many problems with this proposal is the fact that by most objective measures the United Nations is a disaster, an absolute, unmitigated disaster. Indeed, if past is prologue, turning anything, much less sensitive security matters, over to the men in the blue helmets is a guaranteed invitation to anarchy.

Nearly three years ago, we wrote a piece detailing the United Nation’s noxiousness. That piece, “A Dung Heap Called the United Nations,” was, for the most part, the recounting of the U.N. scandals *du jour*, from bribery to rape to child prostitution. Perhaps the most damning story we cited was one penned by Mark Steyn, who, as is his custom, gave ‘em hell. To wit:

Is the UN good? Well, I’m not sure I’d even say that. But if you object to what’s going on in those Abu Ghraib pictures – the sexual humiliation of prisoners and their conscription as a vast army of extras in their guards’ porno fantasies – then you might want to think twice about handing over Iraq to the UN.

In Eritrea, the government recently accused the UN mission of, among other offences, pedophilia. In Cambodia, UN troops fueled an explosion of child prostitutes and AIDS. Amnesty International reports that the UN mission in Kosovo has presided over a massive expansion of the sex trade, with girls as young as 11 being lured from Moldova and Bulgaria to service international peacekeepers.

In Bosnia, where the sex-slave trade barely existed before the UN showed up in 1995, there are now hundreds of brothels with underage girls living as captives. The 2002 Save the Children report on the UN’s cover-up of the sex-for-food scandal

in West Africa provides grim details of peacekeepers' demanding sexual favors from children as young as four in exchange for biscuits and cake powder. "What is particularly shocking and appalling is that those people who ought to be there protecting the local population have actually become perpetrators," said Steve Crawshaw, the director of Human Rights Watch.

As we noted then, a simple Google news search of "United Nations" and "scandal" turns up hundreds of stories of serious, stomach-turning depredation on the part of United Nations "peacekeepers" and their civilian chaperones. And it's not like things have changed a whole lot in the interim.

Pick a global hot spot. Any global hot spot. And the odds are excellent that there is a U.N. mission there and that that mission is making things worse, much worse. Take, for example, Sudan, the United Nation's latest high-profile peacekeeping gig. As *The* [London] *Daily Telegraph* reported earlier this month, Sudan is just more of the same old same old:

Members of the United Nations peacekeeping forces in southern Sudan are facing allegations of raping and abusing children as young as 12, *The Daily Telegraph* reported today. The abuse allegedly began two years ago when the UN mission in southern Sudan (UNMIS) moved in to help rebuild the region after a 23-year civil war. The UN has up to 10,000 military personnel in the region, of all nationalities and the allegations involve peacekeepers, military police and civilian staff.

The first indications of possible sexual exploitation emerged within months of the UN force's arrival and *The Daily Telegraph* has seen a draft of an internal report compiled by the UN children's agency Unicef in July 2005 referring to the problem.

It's not as if the Blue-helmets' proclivity for young, defenseless prey is a well-kept secret. Nor is the oil-for-food farce, the United Nation's inability to distribute donated goods and cash to the Asian tsunami victims, Kofi Anan's rent-controlled low-income apartment, or any of a host of other scandals. Nor, for that matter, is the United Nation's institutionalized anti-Semitism.

The Democrats are certainly aware of these manifest failings. How could they not be? Yet the United Nations remains their universal response to "global crises." Whatever the question, the United Nations is the answer given by Democrats.

So what gives? Well, the answer involves another one of the fundamental differences between the left and the right. On the left, turning things over to the United Nations is the only means by which an action's integrity can be maintained. It is a gesture that demonstrates both a denial of self-interest and a dedication to pure, altruistic (i.e. "humanitarian") ends. It is the ultimate measure of an act's fundamental decency. Or so we are to believe.

Last week, in response to a silly tirade by angry left-wing blogger Markos Moulitsas, OpinionJournal's James Taranto noted the left's fondness for gestures. He wrote:

It's a common trope on the left: the measure of your devotion to a cause is the extent to which you are willing to expand governmental power in the name of fulfilling it. The question of whether a draft or tax increases would, as a practical matter, benefit the cause is treated as irrelevant; what's important is the symbolism of the grand gesture.

Taranto is right, of course, but only up to a point. The left's fondness for meaningless gestures is more than a mere trope. It is, in fact, a deeply held belief.

As we wrote nine years ago and reaffirm in the above article in this newsletter, the left has a sense of good and evil that differs not merely from that of the right, but from that which society has traditionally embraced as well. Objective measures of good, bad, right, and wrong are irrelevant. What matters is the depth of one's sentiments, how much one cares.

At some point we're going to have to pay the estate of political philosopher Eric Voegelin royalties for our repeated citation of his description of the leftist mindset and its application to foreign affairs. But we really would be hard-pressed to find a clearer, more apt description of modern liberalism than Voegelin's "Gnostic dream world."

In the Gnostic dream world . . . nonrecognition of reality is the first principle. As a consequence, types of action which in the real world would be considered as morally insane, because of the real effects which they have, will be considered moral in the dream world, because they intended an entirely different effect. The gap between intended and real effect will be imputed not to the Gnostic immorality of ignoring the structure of reality but to the immorality of some other person or society that does not behave as it should behave according to the dream conception of cause and effect.

The interpretation of moral insanity as morality, and of the virtues of *sophia* and *prudentia* as immorality, is a confusion difficult to unravel. And the task is not facilitated by the readiness of the dreamers to stigmatize the attempt at critical clarification as an immoral enterprise.

Does it matter that the United Nations is an ineffective, corrupt organization? No. Does it matter that the United Nations is populated principally by ineffective and corrupt nation states? No. Does it matter that the many of the United Nation's actions are objectively ineffective, if not downright destructive. Again, the answer is no.

All that is relevant is the gesture. We *really* care about the war on terror, the Democrats argue, so much that we want it to be managed in part by the United Nations. Never mind that the United Nations is more likely to exacerbate a problem than to solve it. The *intention* is to have the United Nations solve the problem. Nothing else matters. And, moreover, anyone who says otherwise is a "reckless Cowboy." One couldn't fabricate a more perfect example of the Gnostic dream world.

One of the biggest problems we here at The Political Forum have had with the manner in which George W. Bush has conducted the war on terror up to this point is his willingness to indulge the left's fetishization of the United Nations. Rather than merely fight the war, he has spent inordinate time coddling dictators, wooing thugs, and accommodating petty criminals all in the hopes of securing the support of a "global community" whose support is neither necessary nor particularly desirable.

Many conservatives were unhappy when John Bolton was forced to resign from his post as ambassador to the United Nations, acknowledging the reality that the new Democratic Senate would never confirm him for the spot. We weren't. Bolton may well be all of the wonderful things his supporters claim he is and he may well have been a breath of fresh air and honesty in the foul and stale confines of Turtle Bay. But he was also a "reformer." And in trying to "reform" the United Nations, he was, as they say, merely putting lipstick on a pig – a big, fat, stinking pig.

We take no consolation in the fact that the Bush administration's efforts at the United Nations have largely been cynical. Like his father, the current President Bush used the United Nations to serve his own purposes, to provide international sanction to his predetermined plans. The problem with this (aside, of course, from the pointless deception) is that in so doing, he (again like his father) legitimized an erstwhile illegitimate organization and thereby contributed to the confusion over rightful, just, and morally responsible security policy.

Unfortunately, this confusion is only likely to grow. With the Democrats back in charge in Washington, the post-modern moral code will once again be on the ascendant in at least one branch of government, which means that we will see an increased emphasis on feelings, and intentions rather than objective measures of right and wrong. This was entirely predictable, of course. It's too bad the "throw the bums out" conservatives either didn't know this or didn't care.

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