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THEY SAID IT

Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character...for one way of framing my contention that morality is not what it once was is just to say that to a large degree people now think, talk and act as if emotivism were true, no matter what their avowed theoretical standpoint may be. Emotivism has become embodied in our culture. But of course in saying this I am not merely contending that morality is not what it once was, but also and more importantly that what once was morality has to some large degree disappeared – that this marks a degeneration, a grave cultural loss.

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1981.

THE EMOTIVE MRS. CLINTON.

It looks at though our prediction that Mrs. Clinton is going to be the next president of the United States has a reasonable chance of being realized. With this in mind, it seems to us that it would be useful for anyone who is contemplating the future of this great nation to spend a few minutes seriously considering her statement last week concerning President Bush's commutation of Scooter Libby's prison sentence.

Specifically, Mrs. Clinton said that the commutation was an example of the Bush White House "elevating cronyism over the rule of law," and proof that the Bush administration "has no regard for what needs to be held sacred." She went on to say that when she is president, "we are going to get back to cherishing the Constitution, upholding the rule of law, and putting forth the best values of America for the entire world to see again."

Now, it is possible that this was nothing more than politics as usual in the good old U.S. of A, the kind of thing that has gone on in virtually every American election campaign since the first representative assembly in the New World was convened in Jamestown on July 30, 1619 and the men there began jockeying among themselves for leadership positions in the fledgling colony.

It is possible that prior to making this statement, Mrs. Clinton and her staff discussed the pros and cons of raising the issue of presidential pardons and decided that, on balance, her campaign would benefit from an opportunity to criticize President Bush and to pledge that her White House would be ethically superior, even though such a statement might be viewed by some voters as a highly unattractive display of what Tony Snow described as chutzpah. If so, her statement was important only in that it provides a small insight into the level of cynicism extant in the Clinton camp.

But what if this were not the case? What if Mrs. Clinton said what she said because she believes it? What if there were no serious discussion of the pros and cons of raising the commutation issue because no one on her staff dared to suggest that someone might link it to what Andrew Sullivan described in *The Atlantic*, as “her husband’s grotesque abuse of the pardon power at the end of his presidency.” What if no one on her staff raised this issue because they all knew that the former First Lady would regard such a suggestion as a sign that the individual who raised it failed to understand the difference between the noble intent of the Clintons and the invidious character of the Republicans in general and the Bush administration specifically?

What if Mrs. Clinton truly believes, in her heart of hearts, that the ethical transgressions that she and her husband committed during their eight years in the White House were different morally than those made by others; that, despite all evidence to the contrary, theirs was, in the true meaning of the term rather than the distorted sense employed by their critics, “the most ethical presidency in the history of the country,” as Bill had promised that it would be?

Farfetched? Impossible? She couldn’t possibly believe such a thing, you say? Well, on the contrary, we think it is not only likely but probable that she believes everything she said, and furthermore, that she believes that her goals and intentions are so righteous and her leadership so crucial to the long-term health and welfare of the United States that any violations of traditional moral and ethical rules that she might have committed in the past or might commit in the future were or would be justified, and therefore not really moral and ethical transgressions at all.

Robespierre, one of the fathers of modern day liberalism, was said to have summed up this governing philosophy as follows: “You can’t make an omelet without breaking eggs.” Danton, an equally bloodthirsty and morally reprehensible colleague of his, put the same thought as follows: “These priests, these nobles are not guilty, but they must die, because they are out of place, interfere with the movement of things, and will stand in the way of the future.”

As we have noted many times in these pages over the past 15 years or so, the essence of the debate that lies at the heart of American politics today, and is abundantly evident in Mrs. Clinton’s race for the White House, is the confrontation between two competing moral systems.

One side in this conflict can be described as traditional Judeo-Christian. The foundation of this belief system was established some three thousand four hundred years ago with the receipt of the Decalogue by Moses at Mt. Sinai. It combines Talmudic truths and the teachings of Jesus Christ, as interpreted and clarified by such scholars as St. Augustine, Moses Maimonides, and St. Thomas Aquinas, each of whom introduced portions of Aristotelian philosophy.

This system embraces a host of traditions, customs, and mores that developed in Western society over many centuries. It is emblazoned with a rich repository of art and literature, and historic struggles, both religious and secular. The twin concepts of “sin” and “truth” are the glue that bind this system together.

The opposing system espouses beliefs that are often referred to today as “post-modern,” although many of the ideas that form the foundation of this system can be traced back to various 13th century European sects, such as the Brethern of the Free Spirit, which believed in the complete subjectivity of authority and disregard for the standards and norms taught by the Church.

The centerpiece of this system is that there are no ultimate, overarching truths; 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. To Nietzsche, history, truth, and reality are all man-made. He argued that “there are no eternal facts just as there are no absolute truths.”

The modern day origins of this system stem from the attempt by 17th century Enlightenment philosophers to establish a moral scheme based on reason alone, via the application of Bacon’s “scientific method” to the study of human affairs.

Descartes, highly influenced by the thoughts of Bacon and Machiavelli, was the first philosopher to publicly attack those individuals and their followers, who, he claimed, drew their beliefs from “the ancient books, their histories and their fables.” These were, Descartes said, a “superstitious” lot, who had “weak minds,” and consciences agitated by “repentances and remorse.” Descartes argued that a “new method” must be found that is mathematical, or reason-based, and he thus became the “founder of modern philosophy.”

It is important when considering this on-going rivalry between moral systems to understand that the post modernist politicians and their followers do not eschew either legal statutes or strict, culture-based standards of behavior, nor do they object to traditional means of ensuring social order, such as law enforcement and the application of social pressures and even scorn on violators of community standards. In short, they are not anarchists.

But since they recognize no moral authority greater than their own judgment, and indeed are antagonistic to traditional standards of acceptable behavior, their views of such concepts as right and wrong and truth are highly flexible and can vary widely even among themselves, faddishly and perpetually waxing and waning in intensity and import.

A post-modernist politician, such as Hillary Clinton, or an adherent to the post-modernist doctrine, may agree that lying is socially undesirable, but he or she will not necessarily agree that it belongs on the top ten list of socially undesirable actions, as in “thou shalt not bear false witness.” He or she may also believe that adultery and theft are bad things, but will not necessarily agree that either belongs on the top ten list of bad things, as in “thou shalt not commit adultery” or “thou shalt not steal.”

Indeed, if one were to compile a list of the ten most popular “thou shalt nots” among post modernist politicians and their followers, it is unlikely that it would include any of the admonitions handed down by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. If these were mentioned at all, they would be on a secondary list that might be labeled, “sins reserved for condemnation

only if committed by individuals who scorn any of the above-listed top ten sins.” As we already mentioned, the top ten list itself would change every so often, being basically a compilation of the tenets of political correctness, featuring the latest “cause” at the top and working down in order of current popularity. It seems, for example, that abortion rights has generally moved out of the top spot in recent years, being replaced by the need to limit one’s “carbon footprint” and support for homosexual marriage.

Within the post-modern system, if one is steadfast in his or her adherence and devotion to all or most of the sect’s the top ten “thou shalt nots,” then condemnation for violating any of the taboos honored by the traditionalists would be light or non-existent. Hence, Bill’s lying under oath, while viewed not only as a crime but as a sin by traditionalists, is considered either unimportant or a very minor transgression by the post-modernists, most of whom view Bill as among the elect of post-modernist politicians for his unwavering devotion to politically correct causes, whatever they may be at any given time.

So yes, Mrs. Clinton could very well believe sincerely, as she said last week, that President Bush’s commutation of Scooter Libby’s sentence was an egregious breach of the public trust and that her husband’s pardons were both ethical and moral. She could believe that Andrew Sullivan’s characterization of these pardons as grotesque was based on criteria that are not just outdated but nothing more than blatant and blunt tools used by superstitious bigots to control and suppress the will of ubermensch, such as her and Bill.

Of course, if she believes this, then she is not just cynical, she is delusional, even psychopathic. At a minimum, if she believes this she is seriously out of touch with reality, which in turn, would make her possible presidency a cause for concern because it would virtually guarantee that traditional restraints on presidential conduct would not be sufficient to control her actions. And this country could be put through another wretched impeachment of a Clinton, or worse, no impeachment at all.

So, as we said earlier, it might be useful for anyone who is contemplating the future of this great nation to spend a few minutes seriously considering Mrs. Clinton's statement last week concerning President Bush's commutation of Scooter Libby's prison sentence. Being delusional can sometimes be amusing in a dinner partner or a guest on a TV talk show, but it is likely to be troubling when it is one of the most noticeable characteristics of the "leader of the free world."

AL GORE AND THE PURSUIT OF POWER.

Last week was a big week for former Vice President and once and perhaps future presidential candidate Al Gore. The big news, of course, was Gore's "Live Earth" concert series, which brought hundreds of entertainers thousands of miles across the globe to sing a few songs and thus to "raise awareness" about global warming, apparently by burning enough fossil fuels in their travels to greatly exacerbate the problem.

The other, somewhat less uplifting news in Gore's life involved the arrest of his son and namesake, Al Gore III, who was detained in Orange County, California for driving recklessly (100-plus mph, in a hybrid Toyota Prius) and for drug possession (marijuana, Vicodin, Valium, Xanax, Soma, and Adderall). It was the most recent in a series of arrests for the younger Gore on offenses involving reckless driving and/or possession of drugs.

For much of the week, there was considerable discussion, particularly among members of the conservative media, as to whether the arrest of the Gore's son was worthy of much coverage. On the one hand, there is no question that the arrest of the child of a prominent conservative politician on similar charges would be grist for the mainstream media mill, with "in-depth" daily coverage, lengthy analyses of the child's problems, and a certain amount of wallowing in the obvious heartbreak and pain caused by the incident. On the other hand, conservative media types have long bristled at such coverage, criticizing

the mainstream press's *schadenfreude* at the public embarrassment of conservatives and their families and arguing strenuously that "non-combatants" should generally be left out of political battles. Thus, reveling in the Gore family troubles would appear hypocritical at the very least.

While we are sensitive to the privacy issues involved here and, more to the point, sympathize with the Gores and the problems Al and Tipper face with their son, we tend to believe that the younger Gore's arrest raises some relevant political and social issues, which cut to the heart of modern liberalism and the culture it has produced and continues to promote. The pertinent concerns here are less about the particulars of the Gore's family problems and more about what those problems can tell us about post-modern America.

For starters, let us state for the record that we believe that those commentators who have argued that Al Gore III's drug issues necessarily suggest some failing on the part of his parents are both naïve and callous, as are the considerably more plentiful commentators who forward similar arguments when the offspring of conservatives face similar issues. While there is no question that parental failings can and often do play a role in the subsequent failings of children, this is, obviously, not always the case. Good kids from good families with good, healthy childhoods can and do have problems. As the old adage has it, sometimes bad things happen to good people – without explanation and without an obvious "root cause."

That said, we can't help but question some of the decisions that the Gores – and a great many of their generational cohorts – made, particularly in light of the potential impact that those decisions may have had on their children. For example, what would one expect Al Gore III and his generation to believe about drug use, given the liberal Baby Boomers' glorification of drugs and the entire drug subculture? Specifically, why would young Gore think that he shouldn't smoke a little pot now and again, given that his parents not only did, but have publicly *bragged* about how "cool" it made them feel?

Just over a decade ago, we wrote a piece entitled “To Err Is Human, To Sweat Over It In Public Is Gauche.” The “sweat” in question was Vice President Gore’s as he tried to explain away his role in the Clinton fundraising scandal and failed miserably to live up to the example set for him by his boss, Bill, who refused to show any discomfort at all about being caught up in illegalities. Among other things, that piece contained the following tidbit about the Gores, which describes their prostration at the feet of music industry executives when Al was running for president and was worried about his and Tipper’s record as crusaders for warning labels:

Tucker Carlson describes the merriment that ensued when the Gores had their change of heart. “One afternoon in late October [1987], Al and Tipper found themselves in the executive dining room at the MCA building in L.A. with Norman Lear, Danny Goldberg, Don Henley, a number of record company presidents, and the lawyer who represents the artist then known only as Prince.” (This lawyer, by the way, was none other than Clinton friend, and later senior campaign consultant, Mickey Kantor.)

While the meeting was supposed to be confidential, one of the participants brought a hidden tape recorder and later leaked a tape to a reporter at Daily Variety [Henry Schipper].”

The tape reveals that both Gores apologized profusely. Tipper called the hearings [on music industry smut in which Al participated as a Senator and Tipper participated as a witness against smut] a “mistake” and rambled on about her opposition to “censorship.” Al proclaimed that he had been opposed to the hearings, but as a freshman minority member of the committee, was railroaded into participating by “publicity-hungry Republicans.” Tipper even agreed with Irving Azoff that perhaps she should change the name of her organization, Parents Music Resource Center, by dropping “Music” from its title.

Unfortunately, this meeting at MCA was not the end of the Gore’s desperate attempt to dance around their problem with the entertainment media. Again, in the words of Carlson:

“The Gores soon began a PR blitz designed to show that they weren’t prudish blacklists after all . . . Within two weeks, Al Gore had announced that he and Tipper used to smoke dope from time to time. Mrs. Gore told reporter after reporter about her devotion to Janis Joplin and the Grateful Dead . . . I was one of the earliest Springsteen fans,’ she told the Washington Post’ . . . I played the drums in high school . . . You’re talking to someone who truly understands rock music . . .’ In other words, we’re not as uncool as we look. Really.”

One of the issues here, of course, is the glamorization of drug use. Liberal Baby Boomers have long insisted that their drug use was both cool and worthy of celebration, an attitude that is both childish and stupid. As the rocker and noted hunting activist Ted Nugent put it last week in a *Wall Street Journal* column, “Death due to drugs and the social carnage heaped upon America by hippies is nothing to celebrate. That is a fool’s game, but it is quite apparent some burned-out hippies never learn.”

But the bigger issue is the *politicization* of that drug use. Liberal Baby Boomers famously put into practice the feminist precept that “the personal is political” and thus turned every possible human condition, including drug use, into a political concern. Al and Tipper bragged about their drug use not because they were nostalgic stoners, but because it was politically advantageous for them to do so. Al and Tipper (rightfully) believed that their drug use could establish credibility for them among certain important segments of the electorate, and so they turned this erstwhile personal and private matter into a public and explicitly political concern.

Unfortunately for Al Gore III, this was not the only erstwhile negative and erstwhile personal matter that his parents distorted and turned into a political device.

It is, we think, worth remembering that Al Gore has made a career out of using his family as a political prop, perhaps more so than any other politician in recent memory. Gore famously exploited the death of his sister from lung cancer to explain his conversion from a supporter of tobacco companies (and recipient of their largesse) to an anti-smoking activist. He has more than a few times cited his father, who initially voted against the Civil Rights Act, as the progenitor of his views on race.

Most notably for our purposes today, he has shamelessly and repeatedly used the life-threatening car-versus-pedestrian accident that nearly killed his then-six-year-old son (Al III) to explain everything from his conversion to environmentalism to his liberal activism and political ambition. Indeed, Al III and his accident played starring roles in Gore's national introduction at the 1992 Democratic National Convention. In his convention speech, Gore described how the accident left his son "limp and still, without breath or pulse" and then declared that the nation should elect him and Bill Clinton because "our democracy [like his son] is lying there in the gutter, waiting for us to give it a second breath of life." The aforementioned Tucker Carlson captured the disgust with which Gore's speech was received by many noting that "It's gut wrenching to see somebody read a description of an accident like that off a teleprompter in front of millions of people for political gain."

Now, the fact of the matter is that it is nigh on impossible to prove a causative relationship between Al Gore's politicization of his son's accident and his own drug use and his son's drug use. As we noted above, Al Gore III's problems may have any number of causes and may be entirely unrelated to anything his parents ever did or said. At the same time, there is no denying that this politicization *could* have affected the younger Gore and *could* have been the genesis of his problem. It is, in other words, hardly a stretch to imagine such a scenario.

More to the point, it is considerably less of a stretch and far less controversial to posit a causative link between the societal politicization of personal

matters, a hallmark of Gore and the rest of the liberal Boomers, and the society-wide problems suffered by the proverbial children of the 60s (and their children, etc.). By insisting that all personal matters should be political and thus part of the political conversation, liberal Boomers also ensured that those matters would be part of the end result of politics, namely government.

Hillary Clinton famously declared that "it takes a village to raise a child." But while the original meaning of that phrase (apparently an old African proverb) was that friends and family should look out for friends and family, Hillary, Bill, Al, Tipper, and the rest of the liberal Boomers took it (and still take it) to mean that "the village," i.e. the government, should arrogate responsibility for children and for their "suitable" rearing from the family.

In all matters – from reproduction to child-rearing to care for the elderly and family relationships – erstwhile personal concerns have been made political and have thus become the purview of government. And this in turn has largely destroyed the very concepts of individual and family responsibility. When everything is political, everything is government's responsibility. And when everything is government's responsibility, it is no one's responsibility.

And we should note here that one need not be a conservative to come to this conclusion. Indeed, liberal icon (though a proto-neoconservative in his own right) Daniel Patrick Moynihan first came to prominence as an academic who noted the deleterious relationship between black families and government. Moynihan detailed the politicization and "governmentalization" of inner-city black family life during The Great Society and the incredibly damaging effect that this had on black communities as reflected in such measures as out-of-wedlock births and welfare dependency. His findings and those of others who have followed can be loosely extrapolated to society in general and to a whole host of societal problems, from illegitimate birth, to drug use, to the frequency of abortion, to divorce, to violence, etc. Unfortunately, the list just goes on and on.

Bertrand Russell famously described liberalism thusly: “The essence of the Liberal outlook lies not in what opinions are held, but in how they are held: instead of being held dogmatically, they are held tentatively, and with a consciousness that new evidence may at any moment lead to their abandonment.” But for today’s liberals, nothing could be further from the truth.

Today’s liberals persist in their beliefs about the role of government and about the inherent benefit of politicizing personal matters. And they always will, irrespective of any evidence that might be mustered to indicate otherwise. Contrary to Russell, their opinions are unquestionably held dogmatically and are thus impervious to any evidence. It would never occur to the liberal Boomers to reassess their conclusion that the personal should be political or to apologize for the effects that that conclusion helped unleash on American society.

Similarly, it is highly unlikely that it would ever occur to Al Gore to reassess his conclusion that his family and his personal life should be political props or to

apologize to his son for the possible negative effects that that conclusion might have had on him. Indeed, if anything, we would expect to see Gore back in the political arena again, if not next year, then in 2012, declaring his son’s drug problem and subsequent rehabilitation to be the inspiration for his comeback and using them as the building blocks for his stump speech. Whereas one might hope that Gore would use his son’s recent arrest as an opportunity to drop out of politics and public life in general and to focus on getting his family well, we worry that he will instead use it as just another in a string of political anecdotes designed to elicit sympathy.

For Gore, as for the Clintons and liberal Boomers in general, the ends tend to justify the means. In this case, the ultimate end is power. And if families have to be made props or otherwise destroyed in the pursuit of personal or governmental power, so be it.

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