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## THEY SAID IT

The proper price of permits for carbon emissions should reflect the future warming costs of current emissions. That is bound to be a guess based on computer models built on guesses. Lieberman guesses that the market value of all permits would be “about \$7 trillion by 2050.” Will that staggering sum pay for a \$7 trillion reduction of other taxes? Not exactly.

It would go to Climate Change Credit Corporation, which Lieberman calls a “private-public entity” that, operating outside the budget process, would invest “in many things.” This would be industrial policy, a.k.a. socialism, on a grand scale – government picking winners and losers, all of whom will have powerful incentives to invest in lobbyists to influence government’s thousands of new wealth allocating decisions.

George F. Will, “Carbon’s Power Brokers,” *The Washington Post*, June 1, 2008.

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## A KIND WORD FOR ANARCHISM.

We are conservatives and our writing reflects this. But we have no connections to either political party or to any individual politician. As such, we are not in the business of promoting any particular doctrine or cause. Indeed, we have always regarded the counsel given by the narrator to Mathew Arnold’s “Scholar Gypsy” as the kind of advice we should follow when it comes to hobnobbing with politicians.

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!  
For strong the infection of our mental strife,  
Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;  
And we should win thee from they own fair life,  
Like us distracted, and like us unblest.  
Soon, soon thy cheer would die,  
Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix’d thy powers,  
And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made:  
And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,  
Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours.  
Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles!

Nevertheless, this week we thought we would engage in a little political boosterism. Our “cause,” for lack of a better term, is anarchism, not as a long-term solution to the nation’s political, social, and economic problems, but as a temporary means of avoiding what looks increasingly like a disaster in the making.

We are going to begin this exercise in political proselytizing by providing a little background on that which we are promoting, hoping that we can dispel some unfortunate misunderstandings about this particular “ism,” and in doing so ease any concerns that some of you might have about joining our movement.

For starters, we would note that anarchists are not, as the name implies, advocates of either political chaos or the absence of all government. Simply stated, anarchists are against any and all hierarchies. A leading anarchist website quotes “anarchist L. Susan Brown” as explaining that anarchists “oppose the idea that power and domination are necessary for society; and instead advocate more co-operative, anti-hierarchical forms of social, political and economic organization.”

The website doesn’t say so, but the basic idea of anarchism comes from Rousseau, who can be said to have sown the seeds of all of the utopian ideologies of modern times, including, but not limited to socialism, communism, and fascism. It was Rousseau, of course, who argued that humans were innately good, that the concept of original sin is bogus, that vice and error are not natural to mankind but introduced from without, caused mostly by bad institutions. The upshot of this idea is that the cure for mankind’s suffering and society’s problems is either more and better government, or, as the anarchists see it, no government at all, since humans in their natural state would happily cooperate with each other as one big happy family.

All of these “isms” trace their origins to the social, economic and political turbulence of early 19th century Europe, where the social fabric had been destroyed by a combination of the French revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic wars, and economic thought was dominated by the horrors of the industrial revolution in England. Nevertheless, while they are sister movements, we believe it is fair to say that anarchism has a better intellectual pedigree than any of the others.

You see, while the young Karl Marx, and his fellow, middle class gang of neo-Hegelian intellectuals (such men as Ludwig Feuerbach, Moses Hess, Bruno Bauer, and Max Stirner) were sitting in the beer halls of Berlin arguing with each other and developing their intensely anti-religious, insurgent doctrines, a barrel-maker’s son named Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who is generally regarded as the founder of anarchism, was in Paris, teaching himself to read Greek, Latin, and Hebrew and writing one of the first, great revolutionary tomes of the period entitled *What is Property?*, in which he answered his own question with the declaration, “Property is theft.”

Marx was much taken with Proudhon’s work, and in 1845 he wrote him a letter asking him to contribute to an organized correspondence, designed to keep communists in different countries in touch with each other. In the letter, he warned Proudhon against a group that called itself the “True Socialists.” Marx thought this crowd, of which Hess had become associated, was too soft, not revolutionary enough, too willing to compromise with bourgeoisie powers in order to defend their own petty-bourgeois interests.

Not surprisingly, Proudhon’s reply reflected considerably more wisdom and prudence than had or ever would be exhibited by Marx, whose theories and writings support the proposition that he had no more understanding of economics and human nature than a soup chicken. Proudhon agreed to cooperate with the project, but warned Marx that “for God’s sake, after we have demolished all the dogmatisms a priori, let us not of all things attempt in our turn to institute another kind of doctrine into the people . . . let us not set ourselves up as leaders of a new intolerance, let us not pose as the apostles of a new religion.” Proudhon ended his letter with a defense of a leader of the “True Socialists,” one Karl Grun. This sent Marx, a confrontational, petty, and perpetually angry man, into paroxysms of anger and prompted him to write a paper entitled *Poverty of Philosophy*, in which he attacked Proudhon and his ideas vociferously.

History records that Marx's communism subsequently developed, as Proudhon worried that it would, into a new "religion" of intolerance, an oppressive, murderous nightmare, in fact. Socialism subsequently developed, as Marx worried that it would, into a giant state enterprise run by a new governmental elite, arguably just as oppressive as the old one, whose primary occupation would be to defend its own "petty bourgeois interests." Of the three, only anarchy remained relatively true to its original charter, as both Marx and the socialists worried that it would, disdaining and attacking all forms of organized, hierarchical government, including, not incidentally, communism and socialism.

The fundamental problem with anarchism was that its aversion to leadership made it difficult to sustain the movement, since movements require leadership. And for all practical purposes, anarchists are as scarce today as Ivory Billed Woodpeckers.

So why, you ask, are we proposing to revive it? To which we would reply, that, in our humble opinion, given some of the policies being promoted by both John McCain and Barack Obama, along with the personality quirks and bizarre ideological reasoning that each routinely displays on the campaign trail, the nation would be better off with no formal leader for the next four years than with the leadership of either of them.

We would argue that a vast committee organized around the anarchist model, with no leader, no formal agenda, no formal membership, and no meetings, made up primarily of the heads of the various government agencies, each handling its own responsibilities as it sees fit, overseen by a Congress kept from initiating any new programs by gridlock and forced to rely on continuing resolutions to fund the various agencies, would create far less trouble than the activist, meddling, ideologically confused kind of government that seems to be the likely result of the election of either McCain or Obama.

Now we are not going to waste time and paper making the case for this argument by providing a long list of the shortcomings of John and Barack. Relative

to John, we would simply note that his support for his friend Joe Lieberman's so-called "cap and trade" proposal for the allocation of "carbon credits" is insane. It is, in fact, a very convincing sign, if one were needed after watching McCain's "campaign finance reform" in action for the past several years, that the man has less understanding of economics and human nature than the above Karl Marx and the soup chicken, and that he should not be allowed access to a personal checkbook, much less to the U.S. Treasury.

As for Barack, the almost daily exposure of his frightful ignorance of geography, history, economics, sociology, American culture, foreign policy, and the art of diplomacy, along with his dismal penchant for choosing scuzzballs as friends and advisers provide so many signs of naiveté, willful ignorance, and bad judgment that one can only tremble at the thought of him sitting in the Oval Office for the next four years.

Now we are aware that we are beginning our campaign on behalf of anarchy a little late in the cycle. Moreover, the fact that we cannot come up with a constitutionally acceptable means for placing "none of the above" on the ballots of all fifty states places us at a distinct disadvantage.

So our advice is to prepare in any way you can for possibly the most astonishing four years in the history of the nation. Without going into details, we suspect that it will look to the unschooled like anarchy. But some of us will know better, but wish that it were so.

## POST-MODERN POLITICS.

Just over a decade ago, we wrote an article, the theme of which would become of a staple of ours from that point forward. That piece, entitled "Let the Big Dog Run," was superficially about Bill Clinton's burgeoning "Monica problem." But it dealt more seriously with what we described as "a battle between two competing moral systems, in a war that has been going on in Western society for at least 700 years." We described this struggle thusly:

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.

The only “sin” recognized by adherents to this system is making judgments about the choices of others. The concepts of “right” and “wrong” are considered to be wholly subjective. Individuals are encouraged to make up their own minds about such things, and neither society nor any person has a right to “judge” those decisions.

Over the years, we have written about this clash of moral systems more times than we can possibly count, which reflects our belief that it is the fundamental conflict in American politics today, the source of much of the current political anger and bitterness and the very font of the so-called “culture wars.” The ironic thing about it all is that most of the nation’s best known political pundits and commentators are, as far as we can tell, totally unaware of this conflict, of its importance, and of its possible repercussions.

Indeed, all but a handful of the political analysts who even deign to address the culture wars appear to believe that they are basically a political side show, featuring big, noisy fights over little, superficial differences of opinion between religious and non-religious Americans, or, more generally, between Republicans and Democrats. Republicans tend to be religious, while Democrats tend toward the secular. Religious people oppose abortion, while secularists favor “a woman’s right to choose.” Religious people oppose gay marriage, while secularists support “equality” and “civil rights.” From this perspective, the culture wars are reduced to a handful of arguments over policy preferences, all predicated on a superstitious resistance to anything that is secular in nature and an irrational anxiety that acceptance of secular progress will necessarily impinge upon the ability to practice religion free from state interference.

This, naturally, is the reason why so many political observers appear to have decided that the current presidential campaign, which still features two Democrats who proudly and shamelessly parade their personal religiosity, marks an end to the culture wars. The Democrats, we are told by these observers, now understand the concerns and fears of so-called “values voters” and are willing not just to listen to these voters, but to pray with them as well, and to assure them that they too have a deep and abiding faith in God and want very much to share that faith with all Americans. They maintain that the post-Baby-Boomer Democratic Party is just as dedicated to progress and social equality, but is less hostile to and even welcoming of religion. All of which is to say that the culture warriors can now sheathe their proverbial swords and accept the newly inaugurated peace.

The problem with all of this is that it is pure hogwash.

It is true that religiosity can and often does serve as a reasonable proxy for one side in the culture wars, while secularism serves as a surrogate for the other. And it is similarly true that party affiliation provides a passable approximation for the divisions in the conflict. But such an approximation is far from perfect and, more to the point, can be highly misleading. In fact, twice over the past week, two seemingly unrelated events,

which occurred during the presidential campaign, combined both to reveal the inadequacy of the current conventional wisdom about the causes of and cures for the culture wars and to demonstrate the imperative of a better and more comprehensive understanding of this conflict and its fault lines.

Now, before we discuss those two incidents, we think it might be helpful to take one more look at the side in this conflict that opposes traditionalism. In the above description, we wrote that “the opposing system espouses beliefs that are often referred to today as ‘post-modern.’” It is crucially important, we believe, to bear in mind that the opposition to traditional moral norms has taken many divergent forms and will undoubtedly morph again. Nonetheless, that single phrase, “post-modern,” is almost certainly the key to understanding the rival moral and political forces as they exist today in the liberal West.

In his 2005 book *Explaining Postmodernism*, philosophy professor Stephen Hicks does as nice a job as we’ve seen of laying out the basic precepts of post-modernism, describing the belief system both metaphysically and practically. His basic description is a little long, but quite valuable, in our opinion. To wit:

Metaphysically, postmodernism is anti-realist, holding that it is impossible to speak meaningfully about an independently existing reality. Postmodernism substitutes instead a social-linguistic, constructionist account of reality. Epistemologically, having rejected the notion of an independently existing reality, postmodernism denies that reason or any other method is a means of acquiring objective knowledge of that reality. Having substituted social-linguistic constructs for that reality, postmodernism emphasizes the subjectivity, conventionality, and incommensurability of those constructions. Postmodern accounts of human nature are consistently collectivist, holding that individuals’

identities are constructed largely by the social-linguistic groups that they are a part of, those groups varying radically across the dimensions of sex, race, ethnicity, and wealth. Postmodern accounts of human nature also consistently emphasize relations of conflict between those groups; and given the de-emphasized or eliminated role of reason, postmodern accounts hold that those conflicts are resolved primarily by the use of force, whether masked or naked; the use of force in turn leads to relations of dominance, submission, and oppression. Finally, postmodern themes in ethics and politics are characterized by an identification with and sympathy for the groups perceived to be oppressed in the conflicts, and a willingness to enter the fray on their behalf.

Against this backdrop, let us take a look at two of the biggest, political news stories of this past week. First, there was the revelation that Jeremiah Wright is not the only radical to preach at Trinity United Church in Chicago, Barack’s place of worship for the past two decades. Far from it, in fact. Last week, we were treated to a video of Father Michael Pfleger, a Catholic priest and “friend” of the Trinity United community. For those of you who have not seen the video, Pfleger, who like Jeremiah Wright is a passionate supporter of Louis Farrakhan, railed against white people, against whites’ refusal to accept inter-generational blame for the “sins” of their forefathers (most notably slavery), and against Hillary Clinton for being white and thus presuming the Democratic nomination to be her birthright.

Pfleger’s rant was, by any measure, hateful, mean-spirited, and disturbing. But it was also well received by his audience at Obama’s church. Despite being a man of cloth, a Catholic in fact, he left little doubt that he favors the secular side in the culture wars, i.e., the side that believes in, among other things, collective guilt, inter-generational responsibility, and group consciousness and blame. Needless to say, this

is clearly not the traditional morality of the Catholic Church, the morality of the Decalogue, the morality of traditional notions of personal responsibility and individual guilt.

In practice, post-modernism is Marxist, arbitrarily dividing mankind into two camps, the oppressed and the oppressors and assigning the attributes of goodness to the former and of evil to the latter. The religious expression of post-modern Marxism is Liberation Theology, the deviant doctrine against which both the previous Pope (John Paul II) and the current Pope (Benedict XVI) spent much of their liturgical lives fighting.

Jeremiah Wright openly and proudly embraces *black* liberation theology, and it is clear from his screed that his friend, Fr. Michael Pfleger embraces the postmodern, Marxist religious doctrine as well. In a less sensitive time and place, there is little question that Pfleger, with his assertion of collective guilt and concomitant denial of individual accountability, would be labeled a heretic. In any case, there can be no question as to which side he favors in the competition between moral codes. Religiosity notwithstanding, Pfleger, like his friend Wright, is obviously and undeniably on the side of the non-traditionalists, the post-modernists, if you will.

This is, we should note, of no minor consequence. As with Wright, Pfleger has been described by the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, as a mentor, a spiritual guide, and a friend. And if average Americans – and especially Jewish Americans – didn't have enough cause to be concerned about Obama, this should provide it.

It is no mere coincidence that Obama's pastor Jeremiah Wright is prone to rants against Israel and against Jews. Given his fondness for the oppressed and his related fondness for anti-Semitic bigots, we can presume that Fr. Pfleger would likely be prone to similar bouts of anti-Zionist sentiment. This only makes sense, of course, since in the post-modern moral construct, the Israelis are the oppressors and the Palestinians are, as Obama himself put it, those who have suffered more than anyone.

At the same time, the likes of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Mad Mullahs of Iran are the post-modern protagonists to the white, imperialist American antagonists. From this perspective, Iran should be given the benefit of the doubt that derives from its status as a nation oppressed and subjugated by the dominant and cruel Westerners. At the very least, Iran is entitled to negotiations with its oppressors, free from the restraints of "pre-conditions," to once again borrow a phrase from Obama himself.

The undeniable bottom line on this is that while Jeremiah Wright, Fr. Michael Pfleger, and Barack Obama are three avowedly religious men, they are not on the side of traditionalism and are, in fact, in the new vanguard on the opposite side of the culture wars.

The second event of note was the pre-release leak of the new memoir by former White House press secretary Scott McClellan, which is highly critical of President Bush and his administration and has the potential to further undermine the administration's credibility at an especially crucial moment in the conduct of the war in Iraq.

As we're sure you know by now, in his book, McClellan attacks the White House "spin machine," accusing President Bush of running a "propaganda" effort to back-up the war and of manipulating and massaging intelligence and other information to make his side of the argument appear more overwhelming. McClellan also accuses White House officials of outright dishonesty and laments the fact that the administration forgot its real job and instead took on the attributes of a "permanent campaign."

There is much that can be said about McClellan and his book and many reasons to question their veracity. For starters, many of those who worked in similar positions with President Bush deny McClellan's most explosive charges. Even McClellan's former deputy, Trent Duffy, took to the pages of *The Washington Post* this morning to gainsay his former boss's account of his tenure as press secretary.

Equally important, there is the matter of the congruence between McClellan's account of his time at the White House and the public's perception of the same period. McClellan claims, for example, that the Bushies ran a sophisticated propaganda operation. But can that really be true? As law professor and blogress Ann Althous has noted, McClellan's charge doesn't really make a whole lot of sense. "It seems to me that Bush didn't do enough to boost support for the war. He let criticism go unanswered and seemed to trust that the American people would understand why he was doing the right things, so I completely don't get the 'permanent campaign culture' charge."

But what does McClellan himself have to say about these apparent inconsistencies? He says they don't matter, since his book is merely a "version" of the truth. Consider the following from McClellan's preface (emphasis in original):

Writing it wasn't easy. Some of the best advice I received as I began came from a senior editor at a publishing house that expressed interest in my book. He said the hardest challenge for me would be to keep questioning my own beliefs and perceptions throughout the writing process. His advice was prescient. I've found myself continually questioning my own thinking, my assumptions, my interpretations of events. Many of the conclusions I've reached are quite different from those I would have embraced at the start of the process. The quest for truth has been a struggle for me, but a rewarding one. I don't claim a monopoly on truth. But after wrestling with my experiences over the past several months, I've come much closer to *my* truth than ever before.

McClellan's former White House colleague Peter Wehner, onetime deputy assistant to President Bush, calls this a "very postmodern outlook that subordinates actual truth for 'my' truth." And indeed he is right. McClellan may be a Republican. And he

may be a former Bushie. But he is also less interested in objective truth than he is in his own subjective version of it.

Is McClellan actually smart enough to try to undermine objective reality with post-modern appeals to subjectivity and context? Based on what we saw of him in his position as White House spokesman, we'd guess he's not. At the same time, it is clear that the popular culture is so steeped in post-modern denial of objectivity that neither he nor the "senior editor at a publishing house" who advised him see any problem whatsoever with substituting "his truth" for actual reality.

Does this matter? Well, maybe. Yesterday, *The New York Times* columnist Frank Rich wrote that McClellan's account of the Bush White House serves simply to further undermine the credibility of the President and, in so doing, undermines support for the war the President started. "Americans don't like being lied to by their leaders," Rich wrote, "especially if there are casualties involved and especially if there's no accountability. We view it as a crime story, and we won't be satisfied until there's a resolution."

On the one hand, we're not usually inclined to take the word of Upper East Side theater critics as to what "Americans" as a whole do or do not like. On the other hand, McClellan's "version" of reality does, indeed, add to the impression that the war was started under false pretenses. And, from the perspective of post-modernism, it doesn't really matter if that was, in fact, the case. What matters is the perception of the situation. And McClellan's "truth" has reinforced this perception.

What we have then, in the end, is a religious man, a Catholic priest nonetheless, and a Republican refugee from the Bush administration, both of whom made news last week by publicly undermining traditional notions of truth and morality. One did so deliberately, with the intention of undercutting conventional conceptions of right and wrong in the pursuit of political power and leverage. The other likely did so unwittingly, in the pursuit book sales, inadvertently

stumbling upon the tenet once expressed by the literary theorist Stanley Fish that post-modernism “relieves me of the obligation to be right . . . and demands only that I be interesting.”

Together, though, they battled toward the same post-modern ends. These two men and these two incidents demonstrate that the culture wars, judged over by the mainstream press, are nonetheless still raging, white hot. They also demonstrate that the mainstream shorthand for the clash of moral codes is entirely inadequate, in that religious and political affiliations, while useful, are hardly foolproof indicators of one’s status in this great conflict.

Most important, though, the two men demonstrate conclusively that this battle between moral systems will play a crucial role in the fate of the nation as measured by the selection of the next president. We are usually reticent to overestimate the importance of individual elections or individual politicians, but in this case, the contrast between the two candidates and their moral foundations could hardly be starker.

Ironically, the one with no obvious religiosity represents the traditional moral code, while the one who professes his faith as often and as loudly as possible, quite clearly represents the competing, post-modern moral construct. Political observers and analysts may not be willing to tell voters this, but this time we’ll cut them a break. It’s likely they don’t understand the difference themselves.

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