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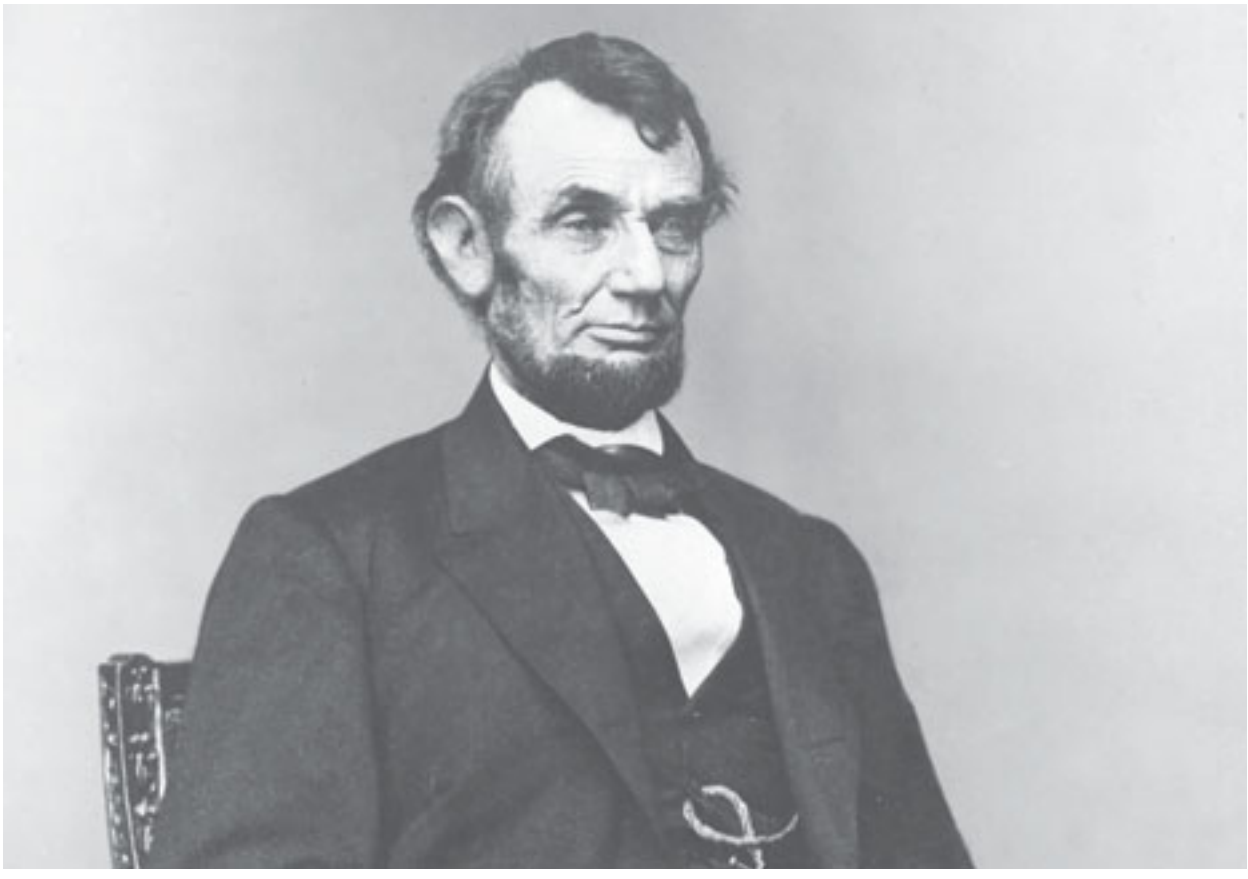

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Contents

February 14, 2011 • Volume 16, Number 21

COVER: AP / TARA TODRAS-WHITEHILL

The U.N.: Worse Even Than You Think

The amazing thing about the United Nations, it's always seemed to The Scrapbook, is how corrupt every tiny corner of it is. It makes mischief around the world in a thousand small ways that receive almost no attention. A case in point: The Scrapbook's Botswana correspondent sends a clipping from the *Ngami Times* bearing the headline "Journalists urged to report environmental issues." It reads in part,

> Speaking at the start of a media training workshop on environment, the UN Resident Coordinator Khin Sandi Lwin [of the U.N. Development Program] said issues such as gender violence and HIV/AIDS are given more priority than environmental issues. She said it was important that the environment should also be reported on, as it is the basis of people's livelihoods. Sandi Lwin said . . . the climate was on the verge of collapse as evidenced by harsh conditions worldwide which are brought about by climatic change. She said despite this, locally there is little coverage on the issues, adding, "and the time to act is now." It was revealed at the workshop that major environmental issues in Botswana were pressure on water resources, degradation of rangeland, depletion of fire wood resources, overexploitation of veldt products, depletion of wildlife, and air and water pollution.

It's a good question why the U.N. is in the business of "media training" to begin with. But that was not the main concern of our correspondent, who writes:

> It's just so smarmy the way the U.N. went at it. Botswana has one of the most pristine environments in the world. There are no environmental "problems" to deal with. Everything has been regulated before problems had a chance to develop. Fishing is controlled, hunting is fiercely regulated, water is clean and relatively plentiful for living in a desert, wildlife is healthy (except for rhino but they are, unfortunately, not flourishing anywhere), there is no industry in Botswana save for a few diamond and copper mines, the environment is as pure as you're likely to find anywhere on earth. Even tourism is low volume (low impact), high income. Scientists from all over the world travel to the Okavango Delta in Botswana to see a water system that is pure and untouched. There are no problems to fix there. . . .
>
> On the other hand, HIV/AIDS is debilitating the country, 25 percent to 40 percent of the population has AIDS/HIV. The Botswana government spends a high percentage of its annual budget providing drugs and education for AIDS. . . . To say that journalists need to spend more time writing about the environment (and how it's "on the verge of collapse") is a cruel joke on the 1.8 million people living in Botswana and affected by HIV/AIDS and its consequences. Families are actually "collapsing" everywhere in Botswana. No one can afford to take in all the AIDS orphans whose parents have died. No one can afford to support all their dying relatives. No one can afford to pitch in for all their relatives' funerals. . . . Marriage is too expensive with all the sick family members to support. . . . Little girls [are] getting raped by older "boyfriends."
>
> The U.N. is so ignorant they think every African country has already shot and eaten all their wildlife, used their water sources as toilets, and sold all their trees. If the U.N. thinks that a hypothetical threat to lions, elephants, and let's not forget "firewood" are greater than sex workers not using condoms and little girls getting raped by their friends and family members, they're even stupider than I thought.

Indeed. ♦

The Charlotte Democrats

First Lady Michelle Obama has been getting some flak—good-natured, to be sure, but flak nonetheless—for her statement of praise for Charlotte, North Carolina, after Charlotte was chosen to host the 2012 Democratic National Convention.

> Charlotte is a city marked by its Southern charm, warm hospitality and an "up by the bootstraps" mentality that has propelled the city forward as one of the fastest-growing in the South. Vibrant, diverse and full of opportunity, the Queen City is home to innovative, hardworking folks with big hearts and open minds. And of course, great barbecue.

The Scrapbook should begin by saying that, all things considered, we would be a little surprised to learn that Mrs. Obama even saw those two-and-a-half sentences before they were issued in her name: The deadly cadence, conscientious button-pushing, and general chamber-of-commerce banality strongly suggest that they were drafted, not by the first lady, but by some eager-beaver young speechwriter in the White House Communications Office.

The reason for the flak, however, is that tribute to Charlotte's "great barbecue." North Carolina likes to think of itself as the homeland of barbecue, and the Tar Heel State is full of experts who have since pointed out that, while Charlotte possesses many civic virtues, great barbecue is not among them. To which The Scrapbook can only respond: Point taken. The first lady (or her speechwriter) was clearly grasping for nice things to say about Charlotte—"Southern charm . . . vibrant . . . [full of] hardworking folks with big hearts"—which could just as easily be said about Mobile or Augusta or Nashville.

What The Scrapbook finds amusing about all this is not whether the Chicago-born-and-bred Michelle Obama knows anything about Southern barbecue, but the Democrats' choice of Charlotte to kick off the campaign for Barack Obama's second term. For while Charlotte is undeniably located in strategic North Carolina, it does not exactly ooze what people

think of as "Southern charm." It is, in fact, very much a postwar, corporate-headquarters, New South enclave, the 18th-largest city in the United States, famous not for its antebellum mansions or mossy gardens but its status (after New York) as the second most important banking center in the country. If the Democrats were looking for a venue in the South, but not especially of the South, they could hardly do better than Charlotte.

Which is probably smart politics, but will make for dull theater at convention time. For if there are any disputes on the credentials committee, they are likely to be resolved in a Waffle House Compromise. If there's a movement to replace Joe Biden on the ticket, it will be headquartered at a Days Inn or, perhaps, a Courtyard Marriott. If delegates stage a walkout, or caucus angrily off the convention floor, they are likely to be munching on Krystal burgers or KFC and swilling Diet Dr. Pepper as they meet. And if things get really dramatic, The Scrapbook predicts with full confidence that party bosses will gather to hammer things out in smoke-free rooms (probably at the Airport Hilton). ♦

The Shameless Kenneth Cole

Fashion designer Kenneth Cole may think twice about promoting his products on Twitter after his memorable lapse in taste last week. He tweeted as follows: "Millions are in uproar in #Cairo. Rumor is they heard our new spring collection is now available online . . . -KC." Followers of the account swiftly responded with outrage, prompting Cole to issue an apology to stave off a public relations nightmare. He was not "intending to make light of a serious situation," he said, and he understood the "sensitivity of this historic moment." The damning tweet was deleted.

The Scrapbook chuckled more than usual, as Cole is a member in good standing of the bien-pensant left, a son-in-law of Mario Cuomo, no less, who actually has a history of tasteless publicity stunts. But this time he got his comeuppance in the same forum, courtesy of a parody Twitter account, @KennethColePR, set up almost immediately after the designer's gaffe. Here are some of @KennethColePR's (fake) examples of how not to promote your product:

- People from New Orleans are flooding into Kenneth Cole stores!
- People of Haiti, fall into our store for earth-shattering savings!
- Check out our new colab with @BP_America -- slick looks for spring!
- People of Australia: Water up to your ankles? We've got your Kenneth Cole capris right here!
- Wardrobe got you water-BORED? GITMO of our new spring collection.

Couldn't have happened to a nicer guy. ♦

Harvard and the Dictator

While the Obama administration is doing its best to separate itself from the Arab dictator who rules Egypt, graduates of the president's alma mater are embracing the one who runs Syria. Harvard's Arab Alumni Association is holding its 2011 Arab World Conference in Damascus next month, "under the patronage of Her Excellency, Mrs. Asma al-Assad, the first lady of Syria."

The event will be held, naturally, at the Four Seasons Hotel—in the middle of one of the Syrian capital's toniest neighborhoods, filled with the boutiques, restaurants, and nightclubs that have been titillating travel journalists the last few years—that is, since the ever-gauche George W.

Bush isolated the regime as a junior associate in the Axis of Evil. Never mind Syria's support for Hamas and Hezbollah and its alliance with Iran, the fashion-forward Syrian first lady has a public-figure Facebook page—to date 281 people like her page, which is perhaps the number of regime cronies and suck-ups who profit from the corruption and organized criminal activities of her husband and his illustrious ruling family.

It is unclear why Harvard grads have tied themselves publicly to the Assads, perhaps over the objections of some of the school's Iraqi and Lebanese alumni. After all, the capital of Arab "resistance," as the Assads and their fans like to refer to Damascus, was a way station for foreign fighters trying to get into Iraq to slaughter civilians and American soldiers. In 2005, Syrian troops withdrew from Lebanon after a 15-year "presence" in the country that the Assad regime is now trying to renew. They can't be doing it for the money because Syria is broke. In a Damascus suburb far from the Four Seasons, the government has relocated many refugees from the eastern part of the country, now undergoing a severe drought. And yet it's curious that while the regime can't see to farmers' being able to feed themselves, it still had the wherewithal to build a secret nuclear facility in the desert—which the Israelis destroyed in the fall of 2007.

Perhaps the Harvard alums are just following the lead of the school's most famous living law student, who over the last two years has sought to do diplomacy with the Syrians, and, as The Scrapbook reported last week, even sent a new ambassador. Still, we think this ghastly event is one engagement to miss. ♦

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Capitalist Pigskin

It was not easy trying to figure out whether to watch the Super Bowl over the weekend. Spending the fall with the New England Patriots has provoked painful spasms of pessimism. It is not that two teams the Pats beat made it to the Super Bowl, while they themselves choked. Nope, that doesn't bother me at all. Not at all.

It is something bigger and more existential that is getting me down. Football games, famously, go on for about three hours, and contain only about eight or nine minutes of actual playing time. The remainder is mostly commercials. So the experience of watching tons of football—of passing a whole autumn of Sunday afternoons recumbent on a sofa in a darkening room, with bowlfuls of snack food and that martial NFL theme music going "Rubba dump, rubba dump, rubba dump-dump, daah"—is wrapped up in the experience of coveting and buying. It is this Siamese-twin association with the real national pastime that makes football seem somehow more all-American than other sports (baseball, basketball) that have just as good a claim on the nation's affections.

It is a dogma of our time that people's true, non-hypocritical desires are the ones they put their money behind. The picture of America's desires and yearnings and values that one sees on endless Sunday afternoon commercials should therefore be the most accurate one available. Only Madison Avenue has the resources and the incentives to capture what "regular Americans" want, and what motivates them. Whether you are a migrant farm worker stooped over in the Central Valley or a hedge fund mogul jogging in Central Park, your experience captures only a sliver of the national reality. The real heart of America is to be found on your couch on a Sunday afternoon.

And if that is true, well, really, what a dump this country is! Just look at your screen. We are obsessed with car insurance and motor oil. We are as easily impressed with worthless gadgets as savages used to be with shiny baubles—particularly as the pace of innovation levels off. (Do we really believe that that Internet thingamabob that permits you to send family photos a half-second faster is really the portal to a "more powerful you"?) True, Americans still appreciate "craftsmanship." We show this appreciation—through a process of reasoning that TV ads seldom make explicit—by drinking huge quantities of beer made with pure Rocky Mountain water. Why beer from the Rockies would ever be made with *im*pure water is left unexplained, too.

DAVID GOTHARD

Our food, on the other hand, all comes deep-fat-fried and in buckets. Much of it looks delicious. The ad for KFC's "hot wings" sent me to the Internet to find the closest outlet. There I made the alarming discovery that nowhere within seven miles of my house does Colonel Sanders ply his trade. (Talk about Red America.) Taco Bell, meanwhile, used to urge on its football-afternoon commercials that we "do" a fourth meal (rather unimaginatively called "fourthmeal"), casting in a more favorable light all those scary statistics from the health care debate about how we ranked 13th or whatever in life expectancy. A country that "does" fourthmeal should be grateful it doesn't rank 213th.

Which brings us to this national impotence of ours. (We can leave aside the national incontinence for a moment.) Advertisements for erectile-dysfunction remedies pose a major obstacle to football-watching as a family pastime. Football, after all, is for seven-year-old boys, and those who have not progressed much emotionally since childhood. When I was seven, the only uncomfortable questions my father had to fear if he let me watch the Patriots with him concerned why Schaefer was the one beer to have when you're having more than one, or why the Patriots always lost. Today, unless you are a virtuoso of the mute button, your seven-year-old will be warned that an erection that lasts for more than four hours is grounds for consulting one's physician. ("Dad," the Internet-savvy seven-year-old will ask, "what's a physician?")

As the curtain came down on the Patriots' season this year, it kept dawning on me what a terrible country we live in, what a terrible world we live in, and how awful humanity is. How awful football is, too.

On the other hand, the Pats have a young defense that is much better than it looks, the best coach in NFL history, and 3 of the first 33 picks in next year's draft. Their only crying need is for a pass-rushing defensive end. If they get him, they will be a better team than even the 2007 squad that won all its regular season games. In fact, next year, the Pats will go undefeated.

Really. Remember you heard it here first. I'll go out on a limb and make another prediction: By then I expect the human race to have undergone a corresponding improvement.

Christopher Caldwell

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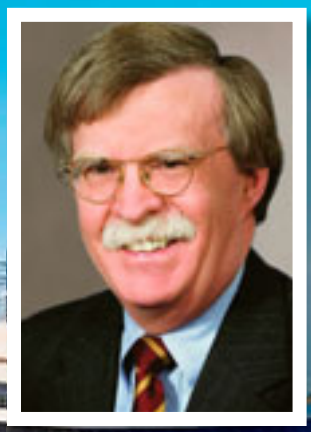

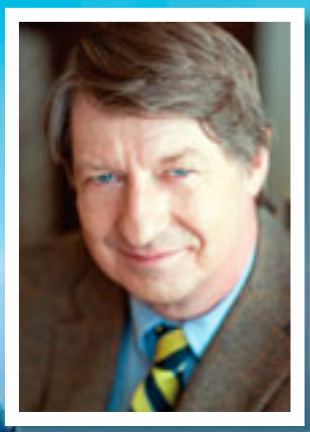

This spring, onboard guests of *The Weekly Standard* will be joined not only by popular faces from the magazine but also by two special guests: American Enterprise Institute Senior Fellow and former Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton *and* best-selling author (and contributing editor) P.J. O'Rourke. We sail May 12 from Barcelona with stops in Lisbon, Bruges, Cherbourg, London, & more.

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Stand for Freedom

Egyptian antigovernment protesters gather at Cairo's Tahrir Square on February 4, 2011, during "Departure Day."

NEWSCOM

Our friend Charles Krauthammer began his column last week by asking, "Who doesn't love a democratic revolution? Who is not moved by the renunciation of fear and the reclamation of dignity in the streets of Cairo and Alexandria?"

Some on the right, that's who.

It's understandable that conservatives should be wary of people taking to the streets—even when they are entitled to do so. It's also reasonable for conservatives to warn of the unanticipated consequences of ostensibly hopeful developments.

As Krauthammer puts it, "All revolutions are blissful in the first days. The romance could be forgiven if this were Paris 1789. But it is not. In the intervening 222 years, we have learned how these things can end."

True enough. And Krauthammer goes on to make an argument for an American policy more focused on the Egyptian Army, less supportive of the Egyptian people, more fearful of the Muslim Brotherhood taking over this broad-based uprising, more cautious and muted in terms of the pressure that the American government can put on the regime, than we at The Weekly Standard have been recommending.

Reasonable people will differ in their analyses of rapidly changing circumstances half a world away—a fact that should make us somewhat tolerant of the Obama administration's own stumbles. But Krauthammer does hasten to add, "The Egyptian awakening carries promise and hope and of course merits our support." And, he writes later on, "our paramount moral and strategic interest in Egypt is real democracy in which power does not devolve to those who believe in one man, one vote, one time."

So, whatever our differences in historical interpretation or foreign policy tactics, we agree with our skeptical comrade that the United States must support the Egyptian awakening, and has a paramount moral and strategic interest in real democracy in Egypt and freedom for the Egyptian people. The question is how the U.S. government can do its best to help the awakening turn out well.

In his column, Krauthammer refers to the French, Russian, and Iranian revolutions. They all turned out badly. But before 1789 was 1776. After 1917, there was 1989. And after 1979, there was also 2009, when the Obama administration shamefully and foolishly did nothing to help topple the most dangerous regime in the Middle East.

Furthermore, in the last quarter century, there have been transitions from allied dictatorships to allied democracies in Chile, South Korea, the Philippines, and Indonesia, to name only a few. The United States has played a role in helping those transitions turn out (reasonably) well. America needn't be passive or fretful or defensive. We can help foster one outcome over another. As Krauthammer puts it, "Elections will be held. The primary U.S. objective is to guide a transition period that gives secular democrats a chance."

Now, people are more than entitled to their own

opinions of how best to accomplish that democratic end. And it's a sign of health that a political and intellectual movement does not respond to a complicated set of developments with one voice.

But hysteria is not a sign of health. When Glenn Beck rants about the caliphate taking over the Middle East from Morocco to the Philippines, and lists (invents?) the connections between caliphate-promoters and the American left, he brings to mind no one so much as Robert Welch and the John Birch Society. He's marginalizing himself, just as his predecessors did back in the early 1960s.

Nor is it a sign of health when other American conservatives are so fearful of a popular awakening that they side with the dictator against the democrats. Rather, it's a sign of fearfulness unworthy of Americans, of short-sightedness uncharacteristic of conservatives, of excuse-making for thuggery unworthy of the American conservative tradition.

It was not so long ago, after all, when conservatives understood that Middle Eastern dictatorships such as Mubarak's help spawn global terrorism. We needn't remind our readers that the most famous of the 9/11 hijackers, Mohammed Atta, was an Egyptian, as is al Qaeda's number two, Ayman al Zawahiri. The idea that democracy produces radical Islam is false: Whether in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian territories, or Egypt, it is the dictatorships that have promoted and abetted Islamic radicalism. (Hamas, lest we forget, established its tyranny in Gaza through nondemocratic means.) Nor is it in any way "realist" to suggest that backing Mubarak during this crisis would promote "stability." To the contrary: The situation is growing more unstable *because of* Mubarak's unwillingness to abdicate. Helping him cling to power now would only pour fuel on the revolutionary fire, and push the Egyptian people in a more anti-American direction.

Let's hope that as talk radio hosts find time for reflection, and commentators step back to take a deep breath, they will recall that one of the most hopeful aspects of the current conservative revival is its reclamation of the American constitutionalist tradition. That tradition is anchored even beyond the Constitution, of course, in the Declaration of Independence. And that document, let's not forget, proclaims that, "Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends [life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness], it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it."

An American conservatism that looks back to 1776 cannot turn its back on the Egyptian people. We should wish them well—and we should work to help them achieve as good an outcome as possible.

Conservatives are used to focusing on the downsides of situations. And there are potential downsides ahead, to be sure. But there is also a huge upside to a sound and admirable outcome in Egypt. American conservatives should remember our commitment, in the words of Federalist 39, to "that honorable determination which animates every votary of freedom, to rest all our political experiments on the capacity of mankind for self-government."

Egypt turns out to have its votaries of freedom. The Egyptian people want to exercise their capacity for self-government. American conservatives, heirs to our own bold and far-sighted revolutionaries, should help them.

—William Kristol

A Time for Choosing

It might have been reasonable to hope, some time ago, that Hosni Mubarak could have overseen a democratic transition in Egypt. But that is no longer the case.

On February 1, Mubarak promised on state television that he would not run for reelection in September's scheduled presidential election. The next day, regime-sponsored thugs arrived by bus in downtown Cairo with axes, chains, and sticks, and a small stipend in their pockets. The day after that, the regime targeted foreign journalists for beatings. Human rights organizations were raided and their staffs imprisoned. A close reading of Mubarak's speech, with its references to chaos and disingenuous calls for investigating the acts of violence and arson, reveals a mind in denial. "You don't understand the Egyptian culture and what would happen if I step down now," Mubarak told Christiane Amanpour of ABC News, even though it is he who is now the greatest threat to stability and order.

The situation remains in flux. As massive protests gathered steam across Egypt on February 4, there were signs that the military was showing its hand in favor of the democrats. Defense Minister Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, for example, went to Cairo's Tahrir Square and mingled with the protesters. It was a hopeful, if tenuous, moment.

Whether or not clearer public statements from President Obama could have averted the abuses of the last few days, or still might help to accelerate and shape a democratic transition, our president has not made them. Since the beginning of the demonstrations two weeks ago, the Obama administration has moved from supporting Mubarak to recognizing that he must leave office. Yet it has not voiced this recognition publicly or clearly. White House statements have stressed evenhandedness and neutrality towards Mubarak's fate. The effect has been more ambiguity than the situation demands.

But maybe we shouldn't be surprised. The president

has done this before. In 2009, when Iranians took to the streets after fraudulent elections, President Obama remained aloof. He withheld support for the Green movement, apparently believing it would hurt the Persian democrats' cause.

Last week, President Obama said, "It is not the role of any other country to determine Egypt's leaders." Of course Egyptians should decide their future. That is why Mubarak must go. But it is also why, after three decades of backing Mubarak, an American president has an obligation to side with the Egyptian people.

It isn't pleasant to say so, but for decades the United States has been a silent witness to Mubarak's repression. The Egyptian dictator created a rationale for his rule and an excuse for the miserable state of his country. Only he, Mubarak insisted, guaranteed the peace with Israel and stood in the way of the Islamic jihad. The result was that Mubarak had every reason to perpetuate, rather than to solve, the problems upon which he rested his claim to power.

The consequence is Egyptian resentment and suspicion toward America. A human rights activist recently told us, "You only care about Israel." Americans shouldn't be surprised that Egyptians associate Israel and its American ally with Mubarak's repression. Nor is it surprising that America is also associated with Mubarak's strangling of political and civil liberties in the name of warding off Islamic extremism. American acquiescence to Mubarak's rule worked against the very objectives that Americans seek.

Between 2002 and 2005, however, when Washington finally pressed Mubarak, he made a major concession, allowing the first ever direct presidential election. Egyptians remembered this, too, and wanted Washington to keep using its relationship with Mubarak to help them bring about democracy.

President Obama did not create America's long dependence on Hosni Mubarak. Over the past 30 years American administrations of both parties have hoped to have it both ways—speaking about freedom and supporting civil society groups while ultimately siding with the Mubarak regime. But President Obama will be in charge when the relationship between America and Egypt changes dramatically. It's time that he stop worrying about distancing himself from his predecessor and become more comfortable with the fact that American power and American leadership are involved—are perhaps even at stake—in Egypt. It is far too late to be evenhanded or neutral.

There is a place for behind-the-scenes negotiation, of course. But the Egyptian people will hear only what the American president says publicly. They need to hear directly from the president of the United States. They need to hear him commit to the future of Egyptian democracy.

—Ellen Bork

Health Care Law Proving to Be Bad Medicine

By Thomas J. Donohue
President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Buoyed by two major court decisions ruling part or all of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to be unconstitutional, Senate Republicans last week took an unsuccessful run at repealing the new health care law. Although the House passed repeal legislation on January 19, it was always considered unlikely that the Senate would successfully follow suit. Even if it had, President Obama surely would have vetoed the bill. But none of this changes the fact that the law is impractical, unworkable, and a major step backward.

We find more evidence of this as each day passes. Supporters of the bill promised that it would lower costs and allow individuals who like their existing coverage to keep it. Instead, costs are rising, and health plans are being forced to change. Officials—including the chief actuary at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services—have already raised the cost estimates of the bill and have acknowledged that the savings earmarked for Medicare will never materialize.

In some states, Medicare Advantage participants are being told that their plans will no longer be available. Workers who have been banking on employer-based coverage when they retire are being told not to count on it. And as premiums rise, owing in part to the new mandates, many companies are thinking about ending their employer-based plans and moving workers into government-run exchanges.

Speaking of mandates, the health care law is unleashing a new wave of costly and confusing regulations. In addition to creating 159 new agencies, commissions, panels, and other bodies, it grants extraordinary powers to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to redefine health care as we know it. At the time of this writing, HHS has granted more than 700 waivers to the law—a revealing acknowledgement that the law is unworkable.

The Chamber opposed this law and favors its repeal. But I learned some time ago that you can't beat something with nothing. That's why the Chamber has long advocated for commonsense solutions that will reduce costs, improve care, and expand access to coverage. We've been strong proponents of health care IT, medical liability reform, and better pooling options for small businesses. We can adopt many other reasonable reforms that will strengthen consumer choice, increase competition, and make health care more affordable.

The president has always invited his opponents to offer him their best ideas—we think these are very good ones that would attract substantial bipartisan support. The ball is now in his court.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Comment at www.chamberpost.com.

Young Man Control

The next step in the liberal campaign against violence.

BY P.J. O'ROURKE

GARY LOCKE

Liberals could not prove their argument that the Tucson shootings were caused by the violent words of conservatives. Liberals then changed their argument: The Tucson shootings were caused by the violent *possessions* of conservatives. That is, the shootings were caused by private ownership of firearms.

Proven, tautologically speaking. Another thing liberals say that doesn't need saying is that America has too much criminal gun use. As opposed to what? Just the right amount? Also, the mentally disturbed should be kept away from deadly weapons. This thesis has been, if anything, overdemonstrated by the left itself, from the French Revolution's reign of terror to Hugo Chávez.

People must be held accountable for their actions, whether with guns, knives, fists, or votes for enormous expansion of government power. As to guns, at least, this accountability is a matter of law. The law is—in a country that probably has more guns than liberals—difficult to enforce. But most laws are. Otherwise we wouldn't have to make them laws. So why are liberals obsessed with guns in particular? And why do liberals feel compelled to vociferously argue empty truisms about guns?

Because liberals are opposed to violence, which is very high-minded of them. Guns are a source of violence in America. Guns are not, however, the principal source. Young men are the principal source of violence in America. This is why it's only a matter of time before liberals—being opposed to violence—propose young man control. This will entail:

■ A thoroughgoing background check of criminal record and mental health status to be required before anyone is allowed to be a young man. A national masculine immaturity database will be created.

■ A longer young man waiting period. The current waiting period of between 14 and 18 years (varying according to state laws) will be extended and made uniform nationwide so that the young are not legally men until 40. This will help prevent impulsive use of manhood by youths.

■ The banning of concealed young men, especially if they are concealed behind Tea Party protest placards or anonymous antigovernment Internet postings. Likewise, sawed-off young men who tend to be more aggressive than their taller contemporaries; rapid-fire young men who talk back to teachers, guidance counselors, and other role model adults, and young

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men of the "fully automatic" type, who never need to be reminded to study, help with housework, or volunteer in their communities, and who seem so well adjusted until they plant a bomb in their high school.

■ The removal from the market of certain varieties of ammunition for young men. For example, the *Grand Theft Auto* video game and beer.

■ Federal registration of all young men. In fact, they already are registered. However, the problem with the current Selective Service system is that if young men are drafted, they're given a gun.

To be fair to liberals, we shouldn't suppose that they want to eliminate young men entirely. The liberal position is, rather, that young man rights must be balanced with the right of all Americans to a violence-free environment (with less of that heavy metal and rap noise and more NPR listeners).

The Ninth Amendment to the Constitution seems to imply that young men have a right to exist—assuming that we include them among "people." But, say liberals, the Ninth Amendment shouldn't be misconstrued as giving an unlimited right to the personal possession of manly youthfulness.

Young men are necessary, at times, even in the most progressive society. But no one can deny that young men need supervision and regulatory oversight. A move to strengthen young man control should not be seen as an attempt to curtail the use of young men for legitimate sporting or recreational purposes. America has a long-established tradition of being young and a man. Even Harry Reid is reputed to have once been both. Passage of sensible young man control laws will bring out the best aspects of this part of our national heritage.

In the future, when we Americans see a group of hulking, steroid-pumped, tattooed young men swaggering toward us on a lonely street, we will be able to feel secure in the knowledge that they are federally licensed and certified. ♦

Don't Forget the Iranians

They, too, aspire to freedom.

BY MICHAEL S. DORAN

The Obama administration is taking the side of the Egyptian people against the Mubarak regime while continuing to engage Iran. In doing so, it risks creating the misleading impression throughout the Middle East that it is actually working to raise up the Islamic Republic over traditional American allies. We cannot allow ourselves to apply our democratic values more ruthlessly to our friends than to our adversaries. The Obama administration should seize this moment to revamp its policy toward democracy promotion in general. It must ensure that, in seeking to behave toward Egypt in a manner consistent with American ideals, it does not inadvertently assist the rise of Iran.

In Egypt we are witnessing the crisis not just of a regime, but of the regional order. For the last thirty years Egypt has been a pillar of the American security system in the region. At the very moment when Egypt became our staunch ally, the Islamic Revolution pulled Iran out of the American orbit. Since then, Iran has been working to undermine the United States by attacking the authority and legitimacy of its Arab allies. Naturally, then, Tehran has been publicly gloating over the riots in Egypt. In this regional contest, Egypt's pain is Iran's gain.

The travails of the Mubarak regime could not come at a worse time for the allies of the United States. Consider, for instance, developments in Lebanon, where Hezbollah is in the process of taking control of the government. This gambit marks a powerful expansion of Iranian and Syrian influence. For several years, propagandists from Tehran and Damascus have relentlessly spread the theme that the United States is a spent force. The resistance alliance of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas is on the rise, they claim. The allies of the United States are on their last legs: Like the South Vietnamese, the pro-American regimes will be overrun as soon as the Americans pull up their tents and go home.

Some actions of the Obama administration have inadvertently corroborated our adversaries' narrative. For instance, the obvious interest of the administration to withdraw from Iraq has strengthened the Iranian claim that the United States is running for the exits. In addition, the decision by the administration to override Congress and send Ambassador Robert Ford to Damascus on a recess appointment was spun by Tehran and Damascus as the United States abjectly courting the resistance alliance. Because the ambassador's appointment coincided precisely with the move by Hezbollah to take over Lebanon, the United States appears particularly weak and incapable of stopping the rise of Iran.

What material does Washington have at hand to construct an alternative narrative? The Obama administration is painfully aware that its alliances with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt are unattractive to young Arabs. A coalition of octogenarian Arab autocrats and Zionists simply

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does not excite the imagination of the frustrated young people who, faced with bleak economic and political futures, now make up a majority of the population of the region. By contrast, Tehran and Damascus offer up a steady diet of red meat for the angry youth. They flout their defiance of the United States and Israel, blaming the problems of the region on the machinations of foreigners and Jews. Bold action, Iranian and Syrian propagandists claim, will drive the foreigners out, purify the homeland, and usher in a more righteous age.

In seeking to counter the Syrian-Iranian message, many are calling on the Obama administration to pressure the Mubarak regime to democratize. Advocates of democracy promotion in Egypt argue that the regime is the victim of its own shortsightedness. By destroying all credible, non-Islamist competitors for power, it actually abetted the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, its rival. The cronyism and corruption of the regime taxed even the endurance of the Egyptian people, who are renowned for their quiescence.

All of this is, of course, true. But a Muslim Brotherhood takeover in Cairo is, in fact, a realistic possibility, not simply the bogeyman that the Mubarak regime has habitually used to scare us. And a Brotherhood-dominated Egypt—if it were accompanied by the further consolidation of Iranian power in the region—would consign a generation of Middle Easterners to Islamist darkness. American influence would plummet.

Yes, we must press for democratic reform, but let us be sure to press surely and steadily. We seek to create a new order, not simply to wreck the old one. With respect to Egypt, we should be constrained by the tension between our values and our interests. With respect to Iran, no such tension impedes us. Our democratic values and our strategic interests are in perfect harmony. The Iranians aspire to greater freedom every bit as much as the Egyptians. Helping them to realize their dream will mitigate a strategic threat to the United States. ♦

When States Go Bust

The bankruptcy debate heats up.

BY JAMES PETHOKOUKIS

It's a solution of apparent Alexandrian elegance and simplicity: Empower America's cash-strapped states to slice cleanly through a strangling knot of debilitating debt and government union cronyism by letting them file for bankruptcy. Long-term liabilities could be restructured, unaffordable labor contracts rewritten, fiscal health restored. No federal bailouts necessary.

This intriguing idea quickened last November when former House speaker Newt Gingrich gave it an animating shoutout during a speech at a Dallas think tank. That was followed by a detailed explanation in this magazine by David Skeel, a corporate law professor and bankruptcy expert at the University of Pennsylvania ("Give States a Way to Go Bankrupt," November 29, 2010). As conservative Republicans on Capitol Hill began cooking up legislation to change the federal bankruptcy code, the concept exploded across the Internet—not to mention in Wall Street research departments.

Liberal bloggers, in particular, seemed to perceive the danger to a status quo where Big Labor elects state and local legislators who then return the favor by agreeing to contracts that, say, allow police officers to retire at age 50 with pensions equal to 90 percent of their highest salary. It's a system that's made government unions crazy powerful within the Democratic party while also helping states rack up some $3.5 trillion in unfunded pension and health care liabilities. (And that's in addition to the anticipated $250 billion shortfall in state budgets over the next two years.) Kevin Drum of *Mother Jones* put it this way: State bankruptcy "promises to become a pretty serious battle. For Republicans it's got everything: The tea parties will love it, it provides an alternative to raising taxes, and . . . it helps defund a key Democratic interest group. What's not to like?"

Surprisingly, quite a bit—at least among some Republicans and conservatives. In a January 24 session with reporters, House majority leader Eric Cantor brushed off the idea. "I don't think [permitting states to declare bankruptcy] is necessary because state governments have at their disposal the requisite tools to address their fiscal ills." The Virginia Republican added, "They have the ability to enter into new negotiations if there are any collective bargaining agreements in place. They have the ability to adjust levels of spending as well as revenues at the state level."

A more pointed critique was offered by members of the highly respected free-market Manhattan Institute, Nicole Gelinas and E. J. McMahon, in the op-ed pages of the *Wall Street Journal* and other papers. Among their many objections to state bankruptcy: It would violate the constitutions of many states; it would damage the balance sheets of banks holding a quarter of a trillion dollars in state and municipal bonds; it might even cause such investor panic as to risk repeating the 2008 financial meltdown. "Bond-market brinkmanship and bankruptcy threats can't save the states from themselves," Gelinas wrote in the *Boston Globe* on January 23.

Even as ardent a supporter as

James Pethokoukis is a columnist for Reuters.

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Skeel readily concedes he hasn't discovered a silver bullet to state fiscal woes. As he wrote back in November, "Although bankruptcy would be an imperfect solution to out-of-control state deficits, it's the best option we have, at least if we want to have any chance of avoiding massive federal bailouts of state governments." Of course, that's the essence of wise policymaking. Every "solution" inevitably comes with trade-offs. The challenge is to find answers with large enough net benefits to justify the inevitable costs and problems.

But the case for state bankruptcy may be better than some naysayers suggest. Even critics don't really deny that bankruptcy—or even the mere threat of it—would be a powerful tool in reducing labor's bargaining power. Government unions and their advocates certainly understand this. On January 24, California treasurer Bill Lockyer joined with the union-backed Economic Policy Institute in a conference call for reporters to denounce state bankruptcy as "a cynical proposal intended to incite a panicked response to a phony crisis." And now that the bankruptcy option has been raised, liberal think tanks that had been arguing for more federal assistance to bolster state finances are suddenly painting a much rosier fiscal picture. As they used to say in the Soviet Union, "It's no coincidence."

Second, it's not clear that pension clauses in state constitutions would bar the sort of union contract restructuring that bankruptcy would allow. The Illinois state constitution, for instance, says pension obligations "shall be an enforceable contractual relationship, the benefits of which shall not be diminished or impaired." But there's an obvious possible loophole, legal experts say, in that the document does not specifically identify the state as the guarantor of state public employee pension funds. Short version: There's no ironclad guarantee. No one knows what the courts would ultimately decide, but there's no reason for preemptive pessimism or surrender.

Third, obsession with financial market reaction is a recipe either for permanent inaction or for another federal bailout. Almost every reform Republicans have contemplated to deal with profligate state and local governments—such as ending the Build America Bond subsidy or linking the tax-exempt status of muni bonds to more accurate estimates of pension liabilities—has been met with a scowl from Wall Street. And it was fear of a financial panic that led to the TARP bailout, the very precedent that advocates of state bankruptcy hope to forestall. (Stanford University economist John Taylor in fact has persuasively argued that it was the frantic, back-of-the-envelope nature of the TARP bailout itself that freaked out investors.)

Then again, some Washington critics might be as worried about Wall Street's financial support as its emotional state. Republicans have a realistic chance next year to retake the Senate, strengthen their hold on the House, and knock off an unpopular sitting president. But that's going to take lots of spending money. Team Obama is already hinting at raising $1 billion for the president's reelection effort. And to do that, it'll need plenty of Wall Street support. But one of the big stories of the 2010 election cycle was how Wall Street—angry about financial reform and Obama's anti-bank rhetoric—dramatically shifted its giving to Republicans from Democrats. Goldman Sachs, through its employees and political action committee, allocated 59 percent of political contributions to Republicans in 2010 against just 26 percent in 2008. For JPMorgan, it was 54 percent in 2010 versus 40 percent in 2008, Bank of America 58 percent versus 43 percent, and Citigroup 54 percent versus 33 percent.

The GOP would certainly like that rekindled relationship with the financial community to burn brightly right through November 2012, both to fill its coffers and deny Democrats'. But Wall Street loathes the idea of states being given the power to file for bankruptcy. The municipal bond market, which has recently been rocked by fears of possible local government defaults, could suffer another round of volatility if the legislation gained momentum. The idea is "clearly not beneficial to an already fragile municipal market," says Chris Mauro, a bond strategist for RBC Capital Markets.

Some Wall Street firms also make big dough off the public pension system and don't want to get on the wrong political side of the issue. Take the Blackstone Group, the giant private equity firm whose billionaire CEO, Stephen Schwarzman, is a big Republican moneyman. (He's also the fellow who famously likened Democratic efforts to slap higher taxes on private equity firms to Adolf Hitler's invasion of Poland.) More than a third of Blackstone investors are public pensions, and the firm recently waded into the bankruptcy issue with this statement: "We believe a pension is a promise. . . . We oppose scapegoating public employees by blaming them for the structural budget deficits that cities and states face. We at Blackstone are committed to helping public employees retire with confidence in the strength and reliability of their pensions."

Despite Wall Street objections and divisions within their own party, expect Republicans to still offer a state bankruptcy bill. A spokesman for Senator John Cornyn recently told Bloomberg news that the Texas Republican is considering ways to deal with state financial woes, "including amendments to the bankruptcy laws." A bill should emerge in the House as well. And if Gingrich runs for president, the idea will certainly get increased media play. Still, given vigorous Democratic opposition, changing the U.S. bankruptcy code won't be easy, even as the public grows more aware of state debt problems and the role government unions play in them. But as Alexander the Great himself once said, "There is nothing impossible to him who will try." ♦

Obamacare on the Ropes

The people, the House, and the courts have spoken: It's only a matter of time. BY FRED BARNES

When U.S. District Court judge Roger Vinson struck down President Obama's health care program as unconstitutional, the White House declared the decision an "outlier." It was anything but that. The ruling on January 31 was in harmony with limits the Supreme Court has imposed on the use of the Constitution's commerce clause to justify far-reaching legislation by Congress. And it came as the assault on Obamacare has expanded to many fronts—the courts, Congress, statehouses, the small business community, and the grass roots, where tea parties and the small-government movement are energetic.

What began in 2009 as scattered protests against Obama's plan for overhauling America's health care system and soon became the touchstone for Republican victories in the November 2 election has now evolved into a national uprising. Last week's refusal by the Senate to ratify the House's repeal of Obamacare is unlikely to quell the uprising or even slow it down.

Look at the courts. The case before Vinson was brought by Florida and 19 other states. After the election, six more states joined as plaintiffs. In a separate lawsuit brought by Virginia, a federal judge ruled the heart of Obamacare—the mandate that every American purchase health insurance—unconstitutional.

So that's two federal courts involving 27 states. Twelve of them were won by Obama in 2008: Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Wisconsin, Colorado, Indiana, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Florida. Though it was mostly Republican state attorney generals who embraced the legal attack (four are Democrats), their efforts have failed to ignite significant pro-Obamacare demonstrations in their states. This should worry Obama.

Turn to Congress, where the November election has changed the balance. In 2010, Obamacare got 219 votes as it narrowly passed the House and 60 votes in the Senate. In the new Congress, 242 Republicans and 3 Democrats voted to repeal it. Another 10 Democrats voted no in 2010 but declined to support repeal. That's a total of 255 anti-Obamacare members of the House.

In the Senate, 51 Democrats voted against repeal. But several appear willing to repeal parts of Obamacare. Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska, for example, wants to find an alternative to the individual mandate. How many Democrats might join Nelson is unclear.

But being identified with Obamacare is risky. In an analysis for the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, David Brady of the Hoover Institution found Obamacare contributed significantly to the defeat of at least 20 House Democrats who had voted for it.

So Congress is on the brink. If a Republican wins the White House in 2012, a gain of three Republican senators will be enough for repeal through the reconciliation process. If Obama is reelected, it will take a gain of four. And three or four Republican pickups in 2012 are quite achievable.

Unless Vinson's decision is stayed by the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, officials in some states are eager to stop complying with its regulations and other obligations. Wisconsin attorney general J.B. Van Hollen told the Senate Judiciary Committee last week his state considers Obamacare to be dead. Governor Rick Scott of Florida said he won't take steps to implement the health care law.

Governors are also upset by the law's "maintenance of effort" provision barring the tightening of eligibility requirements for Medicaid. Health and Human Services secretary Kathleen Sebelius last week rejected an appeal by 33 Republican governors to waive the provision, which will add billions to state budgets.

The business community is still another adversary of Obamacare. The views of CEOs for big companies are mixed, but small businesses are strongly opposed. The National Federation of Independent Business, the influential small business lobby, was part of the lawsuit before Judge Vinson and filed its own amicus brief.

But it's at the grassroots that Obama's health care program is most unpopular. Its poll numbers fell in 2009, worsened in 2010, and haven't improved in 2011. Senate majority leader Harry Reid claims that 80 percent of Americans oppose repeal, but that isn't even close to being true.

A CNN poll in January found that 50 percent favor repeal of all Obamacare's provisions. Quinnipiac put support for repeal at 48 percent, Gallup at 46 percent, both pluralities. And health care has become the issue uniting Republicans just as the party has gained, according to Gallup, a "net positive image" for the first time since 2005, 47 percent favorable to 43 percent unfavorable. A coincidence? I doubt it.

That's not all. Fifty-five percent in a Rasmussen poll in January back repeal, 54 percent would allow states to opt out of Obamacare, 60 percent said the health care law will increase the deficit, 58 percent believe it will increase the cost of health care, and 50 percent said the quality of care will decline.

Those numbers incentivize Republicans and independent conservative groups to keep the issue alive. House Republicans intend to repeal unpopular parts of Obamacare—the tax on

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

medical devices, for example—and bombard the Senate with them. Several may pass.

But Republican senators aren't waiting on the House. Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama vowed last week to do "everything in my power to see that no taxpayer dollars are spent to fund this legislation going forward." He's the ranking member of the appropriations subcommittee dealing with health care. And Senators John Barrasso of Wyoming and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina proposed a bill to let states opt out of the individual mandate, the employer mandate, the Medicaid mandate, and the benefit mandates.

Besides the "outlier" claim, the White House accused Vinson of committing the sin of judicial "activism." That, too, wasn't true in the judge's case. Yet there's plenty of activism devoted to Obamacare. It won't stop until the president's health care law is dead or stripped of its key parts. ♦

The Wages of Weakness

Mubarak takes Obama's measure.

BY LEE SMITH

Washington has finally found out what $1.3 billion in annual military aid means to Hosni Mubarak's tottering regime: It is a bribe to make the Egyptians do what is already in their self-interest. It seems that the American aid package (close to another billion is designated for economic assistance) gives U.S. policymakers less leverage on Egypt than they might have hoped, or else Hosni Mubarak would have taken President Obama's message to stand down a little more seriously. Instead, he has taken Obama's measure over the last two years and found him wanting.

In one sense, what is happening on the streets of Egyptian cities has little, if anything, to do with Barack Obama. However, it's not hard to see how things might have gone differently had the administration held fast to the cardinal rule of Middle East politics: Reward your friends and punish your enemies. By failing to do so, the White House projected weakness in the region rather than the strength that is required to keep enemies on alert and allies in line.

The fact that Obama has lowered the U.S. profile in the Middle East has not only frightened friends and galvanized adversaries; it has created a vacuum in which every actor, friend and foe, feels free to ignore Washington's wishes. Mubarak knew he could get away with crossing Obama because no one in the region has paid a price for going against the White House—if, that is, the administration even saw fit to speak out.

It was the June 2009 uprising following the Iranian elections that first showed Obama's mettle. While millions of Iranians took to the streets to demonstrate, the administration dithered for two weeks before taking a stand. That alone showed the sort of weakness and passivity that emboldens bad actors. But the rationale for the White House's silence only made it worse.

Obama did not want to antagonize the Iranian government because he wanted to engage them over their nuclear program. Every regional ally—from Jerusalem to Riyadh—told him that this was a fool's errand, but the president was not to be deterred, even as the Iranian rulers thumbed their nose at the American president and told him they did not want to negotiate.

The administration also wanted to engage Iran's ally, Syria, even as Damascus was supporting foreign fighters making their way into Iraq to kill American troops and our Iraqi allies. Furthermore, the Assad regime continued to back both Hamas and Hezbollah, who had laid siege to American allies in Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Israel. Instead of bringing Damascus into the American column, Obama's outreach pushed an ally, Saudi Arabia, into the Syrians' arms.

Because the Saudis interpreted U.S. engagement with Syria and Iran as a retreat from Lebanon, they believed it was the better part of valor to court the Syrians, in hopes they might help attenuate Iran's influence in Lebanon. Moreover, the House of Saud and Syria struck a deal over Iraq, where they would coordinate efforts to weaken, if not topple, an American ally, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. A series of massive car bombings in Baghdad did precisely that, and again the administration did nothing to protect its friends or punish its enemies.

Any Middle Eastern observer would be forced to conclude that if the American leader was not weak, he at least lacked a strategic compass. After all, here was a president who kept insisting on the centrality of an Arab-Israeli peace process that everyone else in the region understood was a nonstarter. It hardly helped matters when Obama publicly humiliated America's closest ally in the region, Israel—a piece of abuse that must have amused Mubarak even as it appalled him.

The Tunisian uprising may have given Egyptians the idea that they could bring down their own president-for-life, but events in Lebanon in January gave Mubarak a clear signal that the Americans, as the

Lee Smith is a senior editor at The Weekly Standard. *His book* The Strong Horse: Power, Politics, and the Clash of Arab Civilizations *(Anchor) has just been published in paperback.*

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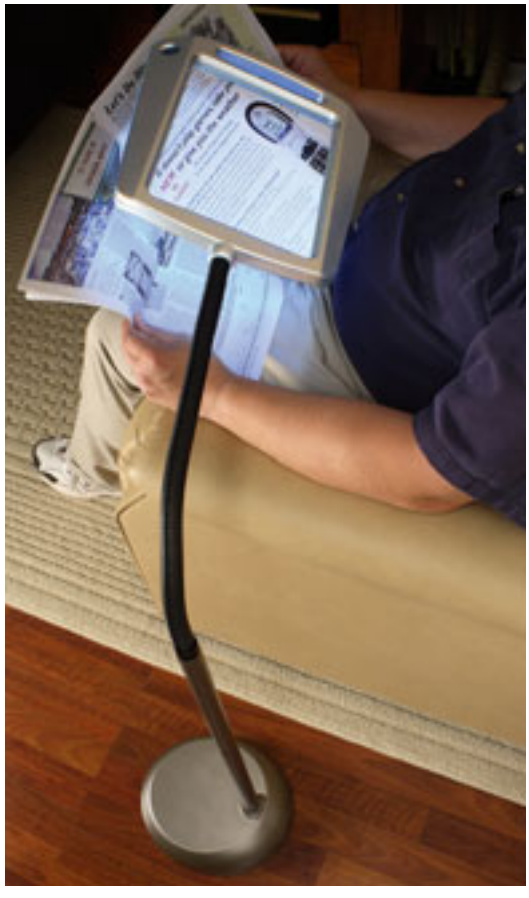

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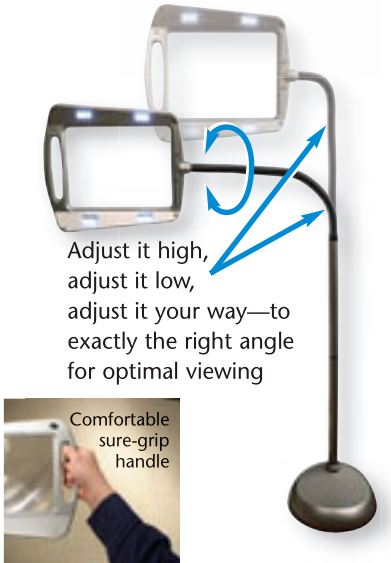

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Ayatollah Khomeini had once put it, couldn't do a thing. Hezbollah brought down the government of U.S. ally Saad Hariri—while he was meeting with Obama in Washington. Mubarak and his generals could safely assume that if the Americans weren't going to stop Hezbollah, which had actually killed Americans, they were certainly not going to pose any threat to an Egyptian army equipped and trained by the United States.

No matter what Washington said, no matter how much Obama threatened, he wasn't going to change the reality that Mubarak shaped by force. In the end, Washington wasn't going to curtail their aid package, and even if they did, what good was it to Mubarak and the generals without an Egypt to rule? They were fighting for their lives while Obama had merely dispatched an envoy to relay a message.

It is true, there is no telling how George W. Bush would have handled an uprising in Egypt, for the fact is that Mubarak has directed a violent counterrevolution that, if it succeeds, will stand as a textbook case of Arab regime crisis management. In his cunning and ruthlessness, the 82-year-old Egyptian ruler has shown us the true nature of the man who defeated Egypt's Islamist insurgency in the '80s and '90s. Mubarak pushed back hard against the Bush administration's human rights and democracy agenda, with too little reaction in Washington, so it is likely he would have outmaneuvered Bush as well during the recent uprising. And yet there may be a reason why—despite a generation of accumulated Egyptian grievances against Mubarak—it never came to this when Bush was in the White House.

Invading Iraq earned Bush at least four years during which Arab regimes, friendly and otherwise, were wary of the man who had American power at his disposal. Putting Saddam down like a mad dog convinced Libya's Muammar Qaddafi to abandon his nuclear weapons program, and the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq may have been decisive in forcing Syrian troops out of Lebanon. Mubarak himself got his Islamists to plead with Washington that they'd had nothing to do with 9/11 and so Egyptians should be spared.

But now Egyptian blood is being shed in the streets of Cairo. The weakness of a superpower in a region where it has exercised hegemony for more than a half a century is dangerous to everyone. ♦

Liberty, Not the Brotherhood

What we should want for Egypt.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

Since the massive street protests began across Egypt January 25, most American observers have had two chief concerns. First is that the extremist Muslim Brotherhood would take power. Second is the Mubarak regime's own potential for violence, which it finally unleashed last week against demonstrators in Tahrir Square.

It may come as a surprise to some conservatives, but the Obama administration is acutely aware of the former.

"This is not about trying to open up Egypt to the Muslim Brotherhood," one senior administration official told me. "The Muslim Brotherhood is the opposite of democracy. They want to use the democratic process, exploit the democratic process, for their own ends. We have zero enthusiasm for the Muslim Brotherhood. We want a secular Egypt, a democratic Egypt."

For more than a week after the first protests, the White House avoided taking sides. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the Egyptian government was "stable." Vice President Joe Biden dismissed a suggestion that Mubarak was a dictator. President Obama's first televised statement made clear that the U.S. government expected to continue working with the Mubarak regime. When the demonstrations grew in size and strength, administration officials called February 1 for an "orderly transition." But when reporters asked White House spokesman Robert Gibbs about the meaning of that phrase, he insisted that the administration was not calling for regime change.

That same day, Mubarak addressed his country for the second time since the protests began. To the American and international observers in his audience, the news out of the speech was that Mubarak had agreed to leave office in September, after Egypt's previously scheduled elections. But to many Egyptians, particularly those on the streets, a different passage stood out.

> The events of the last few days impose on us all, as people and as a leadership, choosing between chaos and stability, and brings in front of us new circumstances and a different Egyptian reality, which our army must deal with in the most wise of ways in order to protect Egypt's interests and its children.

To many in Tahrir Square, this meant that Mubarak would not leave power easily. More ominously, the words suggested Mubarak intended to end the chaos with violence.

There had been other signs that things would turn ugly. In the hours before the speech, state-run Nile-TV peddled conspiracy theories suggesting that the demonstrations had been somehow directed by foreigners—the

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West, the Americans and, of course, the Jews. Nonetheless, the anchor downplayed the antigovernment protests as small and insignificant and insisted that the demonstrators were not representative of the country. He hopefully informed viewers that there were massive pro-Mubarak rallies in the streets—gatherings that somehow managed to escape the attention of the hundreds of independent journalists in Cairo. The anchor suggested that these pro-regime counterprotests would overwhelm the dwindling antigovernment agitators remaining on the streets.

At the time, the broadcasts seemed to reflect the paranoid delusions of a regime losing its tenuous grip on power. In retrospect, they look like a plan.

The crackdown came quickly. Pro-Mubarak elements gathered overnight to challenge the antigovernment groups. Snipers perched above Tahrir Square began to fire on the demonstrators. At precisely 2:15 P.M. February 2, pro-regime forces switched from chants to attacks. Mubarak loyalists, some riding horses and camels, simultaneously charged the square from each of its exits, whipping and beating anyone in reach. The unlucky ones lost their mount and were beaten, their government IDs taken by the antigovernment protesters and shown to journalists. Egyptian police began to systematically round up journalists and human rights activists. Government vehicles were turned into weapons. In one horrifying scene, a truck from the Interior Ministry accelerated into a crowd of anti-government protesters, leaving several bloodied, broken bodies in its wake. In another, a fire engine ran down a protester, crushing him.

Even in the aftermath of the bloodshed, the Obama administration was reluctant to accuse the Mubarak regime directly of condoning the violence. The White House and State Department lamented "coordinated" and "concerted" attacks on protesters but without any indication of who was doing the coordinating and concerting.

Many Republicans withheld public judgment on the matter. Some even offered a soft endorsement of the White House approach. But others spoke out. Representative Thad McCotter, a Republican from Michigan, put out a statement on January 28. "The Egyptian demonstrations are not the equivalent of Iran's 2009 Green Revolution," he declared. "The Egyptian demonstrations are the reprise of Iran's 1979 radical revolution."

Although McCotter offered no evidence to support his claim, other Republicans on Capitol Hill privately echoed his fatalism. Within days, several of the most powerful voices on conservative talk radio were lamenting Egypt's coming radicalism and some were even defending Mubarak. Glenn Beck hinted that the demonstrations were the result of cooperation between radical Islamists in Egypt and Obama-supporting radical leftists in the United States. (In 1969, Bill Ayers's Weather Underground participated in "Days of Rage," and organizers in Egypt called the first day of protests there "A Day of Rage"—a coincidence that Beck's "study guide" called "telling.") On February 4, after Mubarak's crackdown, Rush Limbaugh responded to a caller who wondered, in the spirit of the Super Bowl, who he should root for in Egypt. Limbaugh acknowledged that "nobody knows who to root for right now." But, he added, "There are a lot of people on this who would think on this we need to be rooting for Mubarak. If you are concerned about U.S. national interests, Mubarak seems to be who to root for."

Limbaugh continued, sarcastically: "There are so many people who are portraying this as a big democracy movement. That's why we in the U.S.—we stand for democracy, we've got to get behind it—the Muslim Brotherhood does not equal democracy to me."

Limbaugh, McCotter, and others are confusing their valid concern about what could follow such an uprising with what has actually taken place. Mubarak and his thugs used extreme brutality to put down a genuine democratic uprising, not the Muslim Brotherhood. By all accounts, the Muslim Brotherhood played only a marginal role in the events of January 25 and in the days that immediately followed. By January 29, they were showing up in greater numbers at the protests in Cairo. They were there. But they were not dominant.

Walid Phares, a Fox News analyst and regional expert, described the early stages of the protests in an interview with *National Review*. "Those who took to the streets first were students, the middle class, workers, and farmers, and the protest widened from there," he explained. "The Muslim Brotherhood were last to join, as they were weighing the situation."

I spoke to a secular, liberal Egyptian Friday after he returned from his daily trip to Tahrir Square. I asked him about claims that the Muslim Brotherhood was a significant presence. "That's not true. It's a cross-section of everyone—from the rich to the poor, the conservative to the liberal."

Later, he emailed:

> The square is like the Hyde Park Speakers' Corner. People have come with different messages but with the same objectives. No one dominated anything. Men and women walking in many instances alone carrying their homemade banners. A big podium with huge speakers had a religious guy talking followed by a liberal nicely dressed and not veiled woman.
>
> Those people always surprised me at how politically savvy they were. I would argue that what happened is the best means for a transition of power for an unsustainable system. There's a nascent middle that could help marginalize any extremists.

Could. If the Muslim Brotherhood did not play a major role in organizing the protests and did not dominate them, Limbaugh and others are correct that it is still a serious concern—the most serious concern in a post-Mubarak Egypt. The White House seems to understand this. ♦

Democracy in Egypt

Why the West should welcome a political upheaval in the Middle East

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

After observing the administrative practices in the realm of Muhammad Ali, the Ottoman pasha of Egypt in the early 19th century, William Edward Lane, the great Arabic lexicographer, commented:

> Most of the governors of provinces and districts carry their oppression far beyond the limits to which they are authorized to proceed by the Básha [Muhammad Ali]; and even the sheikh of a village, in executing the commands of his superiors, abuses his lawful power. Bribes and the ties of relationship and marriage influence him and them, and by lessening the oppression of some, who are more able to bear it, greatly increase that of others. But the office of a sheikh of a village is far from being a sinecure. At the period when the taxes are demanded of him, he frequently receives a more severe bastinadoing than any of his inferiors; for when the population of a village does not yield the sum required, their sheikh is often beaten for their default. . . . All the fellaheen [peasants] are proud of the stripes they receive for withholding their contributions. . . . Ammianus Marcellinus gives precisely the same character to the Egyptians of his time.

The Egypt of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar El-Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak made traditional "Oriental despotism" vastly more modern and merciless. Lane's accounts of Muhammad Ali—Egypt's first great modernizer, not known for his kindness—and his senior officials occasionally casting a vengeful eye on excessively corrupt officials and showing mercy to their victims seem quaint today given the cruel, predatory habits of President Mubarak, his family and friends, and his security men. With the exception of Syria, where the religiously heretical (Shiite) Alawite ruling family of Bashar al-Assad oversees a ferocious police state, Mubarak's Egypt is the most advanced dictatorship in the Arab world. A Stasi-like array of spies spans the country, but discreetly and gently watches resident foreign businessmen, the Westernized Egyptian elite, and the American University of Cairo, a once-vibrant institution founded in 1919 by Presbyterians, now intellectually withered, where Egyptian and Western academics have exercised extraordinary caution in imparting disruptive ideas or criticism of the ruling family. Mubarak and his friends discovered that an Egypt at peace with Israel could attract billions in U.S. aid, regardless of the regime's human rights record, and billions more from tourism, whose profitability continued even when Mubarak's police state crushed the liberal dissident and presidential candidate Ayman Nour in 2005. Only the country's religious extremism when it turned lethally against Western tourists made a dent.

But the modern Egyptian *fellaheen*—the urban poor, the semi-educated youths from the country's awful state universities, and a good slice of Egypt's not insignificant middle class—have finally had enough. As is now well known thanks to the massive demonstrations in Tahrir Square, the country is a land of stark extremes. In Cairo, multimillion-dollar riverine apartments and lushly watered exurban golf courses built on sand look out upon an endless horizon of low-rise, nearly windowless brick apartment buildings, which are virtually uninhabitable during Egypt's summer. These "homes" are stuffed with people who *can* see progress. (Cairo is a vibrant mess of a modern city.) Egypt's acid-tongued poor can read. Sixty years of socialist-turned-capitalist dictatorship have given the Egyptian masses sufficient education to dream; it's given the bright among the poor and the country's growing middle class the means to aspire. Like much of the Middle East without oil, Egypt has been growing economically (around 6 percent per annum for the last five years). Using the standard set by Harvard's late Samuel Huntington, Egypt economically is beyond the democratic "transition zone," where a society's complexities start to overload centralized authoritarian states and the common man's dreams become tangible.

Other convulsive social problems add to this volcanic resentment. Imagine a deeply conservative society where men cannot afford to marry, where male honor revolves around married life, around having a home where each

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man, no matter how low in class, can find peace, a little dominion, and bit of bliss. Envision 30-year-old jobless men who have never had sex with a woman, dream about it constantly, prowl tourist neighborhoods to put a hand on foreign flesh, and engage alone or with other men in sexual practices that the society officially loathes, and it's astonishing that Egypt hasn't suffered more spontaneous riots. Now combine government and social dysfunction with frustrated idealism—the Western ideas that have become *common* aspirations throughout the Middle East. The good side of Western modernity—its emphasis on civil rights, democracy, and the individual's right to pursue a bit of happiness—has married up with Islam's historic and often rebellious concern with justice, that rulers, too, have obligations to abide by the rules laid down by the Almighty.

Hosni Mubarak and the other presidents-for-life, kings, and emirs of the Middle East have the bad luck to rule when the democratic wave has finally arrived. They have the bad luck to rule in an age when even Islamists are wrestling with the challenge and seductiveness of representative government. One hundred and eighty years ago when William Lane was living in Egypt, the average Egyptian, even a member of the local elite, had no conception that he had a right to participate in the government of the Nile Valley. This right belonged to Turkish-speaking Ottoman overlords, of whom Muhammad Ali, an Albanian, became the founder of an "Egyptian" dynasty. Today, a vast swath of Egyptians—secularists, Islamists, and everyone in between—really do believe that they have a right to choose their leaders.

Both liberal and fundamentalist literature is full of this democratic ethos. The concepts of *masuliya*—that the people can be responsible for their own fate—and *hurriya*—"freedom," an ancient term denoting a free man as opposed to a slave, which now moves ever closer to the Western understanding of inalienable rights of the individual against the state—are shaking the Middle East before our eyes. This may be a hard truth to swallow for American and European "realists," who've never much appreciated the power of liberal Western ideas in third-world lands. (To read the writings of Zbigniew Brzezinski on democracy and the Middle East—to recall the attention that the media and Washington lavished on him during the dark days in Iraq—is to realize how intellectually parochial and morally flexible "realists" and Washington's foreign-policy establishment can be.) But after Tunisia and Egypt and the irruptions elsewhere in the Arab world, this obdurateness may, just possibly, diminish.

This doesn't mean that democracy is going to succeed in Tunisia or Egypt or anywhere else where we are witnessing demonstrations. The power of Arab police states should never be underestimated. The only things that function relatively well in Arab lands are the internal security services and the armies, the great beneficiaries of modernization. But the chances of democracy progressing are better now than ever before.

The movement has deeper intellectual roots than most in the West have thought. Arab liberals, especially those who are abroad in the safety of the West, have done a better job than many people have given them credit for of keeping a democratic debate alive. Arabs may not have a vibrant democracy anywhere in the Middle East (Iraq is, slowly, painfully, getting there), but they do have a virtual one, courtesy of the Internet and satellite Arabic television, which, even when controlled by a Wahhabi potentate in Qatar, has developed a remarkable jousting ethos, pitting expatriate and Iraqi liberal democrats against Islamists, and both against the mouthpieces of state power. Al-Jazeera is many unpleasant things, but it has shown with the uprising in Egypt and Tunisia that its heart and money are unquestionably with democrats in both countries. It may be too much to say that the Arab Revolt wouldn't have happened without al-Jazeera, but the revolt's speed owes much to al-Jazeera's (and the Saudi-owned al-Arabiya's) round-the-clock, intrepid reporting.

By comparison with Iran—where populist powerhouses like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad really do have a following among the poor, and the Islamic Republic's revolutionary ethos plays to an identity that isn't completely dead among the faithful—the Arab dictatorships and kingdoms have little going for them. When Mubarak's recently minted vice president, Omar Suleiman, the former head of Egyptian intelligence, went on television to explain why Egyptians should rally around him and trust President Mubarak's plans for reform, Suleiman counted up the virtues of the current regime without ever alluding to an ideological basis for Mubarak's government.

He couldn't. There isn't one. He can pretend that Mubarak is the "father" of all Egyptians—but most Egyptians would deny that paternity. He can talk endlessly about the economics of tourism, which the Mubarak regime has certainly improved, at least for the Egyptians fortunate enough to work in the better-paying jobs in this industry. He can talk, surreally, about the social peace that the Mubarak regime supposedly bequeathed to Egypt. But he can, when it comes to an organizing principle of government, allude only to a shameful promise of "more" democracy, since the Egyptian regime cannot do without the pretense that it rules with the people's consent. European fascists could proudly discard self-government as the enemy of the people's will, united and expressed through the leader. But there isn't an Arab secular dictator who

could give that speech today without his minions laughing. From the left to the right, from the most devout to the most secular, Egyptians who want to appeal to their countrymen cannot openly gainsay democracy.

What ought to be clear—but obviously isn't, given the considerable Western trepidation that has greeted this rebellion, especially on the American right and in Israel—is that the West should want this revolution to continue, even if it allows the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood much greater influence.

In so many ways, Egypt, like all Arab states, is an unrelentingly immature society, where conspiracy replaces reason, and the worst hatreds—especially anti-Semitism—are accepted without the slightest objection. Dinner parties with the Egyptian elite—let alone Muslim Brothers—can be so conspiracy-afflicted as to make Noam Chomsky look nice, introspective, and analytically evenhanded. This is what we can always expect from dictatorial societies. But there is an antidote.

Democracy—understood as a culture of respect for legitimate authority, free media, and individual freedom to work and to organize and assemble, not just the regular holding of elections—introduces competition into every corner of society. It creates an unending ethical battle between opposing sides. Anyone who has been to the Middle East for any time or attended one of the interminable conferences sponsored by Middle Eastern universities or state-sponsored think tanks knows that Arabs rarely engage in much debate at these events: They rarely try to convince the opposing side. To matter, debate must carry the possibility of practical consequences. What we call "rationality"—which Iran's astonishing pro-democracy intellectuals, who've seized the moral and spiritual high ground from those who support theocracy, constantly seek in their own society—is the mental process that democracy fosters. The citizenry, while neither saintly nor immune to passions, is broadly speaking "rational" in the West because there is daily demand for and tangible benefit from ratiocination. This is not at all the case in the Muslim Middle East, where most men are powerless and most of society's great concerns are decided behind closed doors, or as the Iranians more poetically put it, *pusht-e pardeh*, "behind the curtains."

What we want to see happen in Arab lands and in Iran is real intellectual competition—the starting point for healthy evolution. In particular, we want to see devout Sunni Muslims in Egypt try to figure out what exactly are "Islamic values." We should like to see Islam's classical schools of law revitalized, not thrown in the dustbin as they so often have been by the Middle East's secularizing dictatorships. We want to see Malikis versus Hanafis versus Shafiis versus Hanbalis (especially the Hanbalis who are close to the Saudi interpretation of the faith) versus the Shiite Jafaris. We want to see them argue, as they did long ago in Sunni Islam's formative legal period, that no one can represent or embody the divine will—that, as the liberal Egyptian Islamic jurist Khaled Abou El Fadl puts it, "human knowledge is separate and apart from Divine knowledge." Man's foremost moral and legal duty is thus to guard himself against error and ignorance, to resist the hubris that through *fiqh*, the study of the Holy Law, any man can exclusively know God's order. Modern autocracies in the Middle East have suppressed such philosophical debates, as they have suppressed so much else.

Parliaments, once they get going, have a way of looking upon themselves as supreme. Legislatures, not clerical schools, are likely to be the decisive forum for great ethical debates, especially among Sunni Muslims, who have no clerical hierarchy and are already subject to a wild proliferation of "*fatwas*," juridical decisions, by clerics and would-be clerics who pointedly say that "your *fatwa* is no better than my *fatwa*." It is likely in any Muslim society that goes democratic that what in the past was the domain of judges and scholars in religious schools—interpreting the Koran and assessing the relevance and value of the Traditions of the Prophet—will become the domain of legislatures, particularly in Sunni Arab lands where the organization, prestige, and soft power of the clergy is vastly less than among Shiites. In Egypt, there will be no Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, whose awesome charisma gutted the Iranian revolution of its liberal democratic and secular impulses. Parliamentary interest in religious/ethical issues could fuel a healthy give-and-take between elected representatives of the people and the faith's traditional guardians—the type of organic growth in debate about law, society, and religion that has been all but absent during the pan-Arab and Arab-nationalist era since World War II.

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood released a political platform, then withdrew it, and then unofficially rereleased it in 2007. This was the first platform in its history, and it provoked considerable controversy among members and supporters of the Brotherhood. It provoked even more furor in the Coptic Christian community, because the first draft contained references to a religious oversight body that would judge the content of legislation passed by parliament. The idea was withdrawn. Although Cairo is the seat of the Al-Azhar religious establishment, the most prestigious in the Sunni world, the Brotherhood does not enjoy the imprimatur of Al-Azhar. The two have often had a tense, competitive relationship. How the Brotherhood would—if it actually could—organize a supervisory body for the Egyptian legislature is as unclear

now as it was before the Brotherhood first published its platform. This shows that democracy is an acquired taste and that not all members of the Brotherhood want to let Egyptians have full rein. A powerful strain in Islamic thought teaches that humans have many bad impulses, especially libidinous ones, and they need to be constrained by the law.

Through the democratic process, the Egyptian Brothers, like all Arab fundamentalists, will get to discover "Islamic values." If the majority of Egyptian Muslims repeatedly votes one way, it is a good bet that the Brotherhood, always sensitive to public opinion, will find that commendable Muslim values overlap rather well with Egyptian voting patterns. The Sunni clergy's historically conservative ethos has usually bent to authority but also, and especially, to popular consensus. The medieval clergy strongly disliked Sufism, for instance, but reluctantly accepted it when it became too popular to condemn and once the great theologian Al-Ghazali successfully blended it into orthodoxy. Sufism in its many medieval manifestations was often wildly heterodox, pushing the envelope of recognizable Islamic practice and belief.

Incorporating democracy into "traditional" Islamic dogma, the type worshipped by many Muslim Brothers, will likely be easier than the slow acceptance of Sufism, which still causes many clerics to recoil. If Arab Muslims want to vote for their leaders—and the evidence in the highly Westernized and urbanized countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Iraq) is that they do—the clerical establishment and the Muslim Brothers are unlikely to fight a rearguard action against it. It's possible that Egyptian Muslims will vote en masse for the Brotherhood because they like the organization's profound cultural conservatism, but if this is so, it's most likely that Egyptians, like the once-devout Iranian revolutionaries who now back reform, will prove highly variable in their loyalty.

The Brotherhood will have to survive constant competition from Egypt's liberals and secular nationalists, who have an older history in the country than the Islamists. They will have to survive the competition of devout Muslims who bristle at the Brotherhood's heavy-handedness. We should not assume that devout Muslims will be less subject to faction than their secular brethren. It's possible that the Muslim Brotherhood could pull off a military coup, but it seems unlikely. Their paramilitary forces are pathetic compared with the Egyptian Army, which has so far not shown itself, even in the lower ranks, to be blindly enamored of the Brotherhood. The organization would likely confront an enormous social, and quite possibly a military, backlash if it attempted to abort free elections once they got going.

The key here is elections soon—September is way too late. Periodic elections are what most powerfully builds democratic institutions and culture. As the French scholar Olivier Roy has written, "If we had to wait for everyone to become a democrat before creating democracy, France would still be a monarchy." It's now plain that Mubarak's regime has no intention of transferring power beyond his inner circle. It's becoming increasingly clear that the senior ranks of the military are siding with Mubarak in his ever more violent attempts to squash the protests. For better or worse, what's happening in Egypt will continue to reverberate throughout the region. If Washington and Jerusalem are dreading an empowered Muslim Brotherhood, a vicious clampdown on the democratic rebellion will surely make the next irruption much more radical and violent.

A democratizing Egypt could change the face of the Middle East. Political evolution could start. No doubt the American and Israeli embrace of Mubarak's detested dictatorship will carry a price, perhaps a stiff price, in a democratic Egypt. It is the cost of our having sought to build stability on an authoritarian illusion. But for Mubarak's regime, or a military successor, to hold on would be a catastrophe for the United States. All of the cancers of the region—especially Islamic militancy—would get worse.

President Obama has only one trump to play—the American subventions to the Egyptian armed forces. If the violence continues, we need to tell the Egyptian military that we will immediately cut off all military aid. We can say this in private, but if (when) the army ignores Washington, we should say it in public, giving Cairo 24 hours. By so doing, President Obama would not be choosing the next Egyptian leader, but he would be saying unequivocally that U.S.-Egyptian relations henceforth are based on democratic values. "Realists" may object. But the realists have been egregiously wrong for decades.

The promise of democracy for Muslims offers something historically unparalleled. For the first time since the early caliphs, it holds out the possibility of an organic, reciprocal relationship between leaders and their communities. It could begin to undermine Islam's long history of rebellious religious violence. It could give the Middle East's Muslims some of the elemental, nonthreatening, unflappable pride and self-confidence that Americans, the oldest modern democrats, have in spades. In an age of proliferating nuclear weapons, that would be a very good thing for believers and nonbelievers alike. It could also give back to Egypt what William Lane, and so many others, found to be the Egyptians' most sterling quality—their "cheerfulness." ♦

The Replacement

After Obamacare is repealed, Republicans should offer sensible improvements to the health care system

By Jeffrey H. Anderson

When discussing Obamacare during his State of the Union address, President Obama told congressional Republicans, "I am eager to work with you" in finding ways "to improve this law." But Obamacare has never lent itself to meaningful compromise or substantial revision, as its supporters have been the first to note. Shortly before last year's health summit, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius discouraged much tinkering, explaining that the complex interconnectedness of Obamacare's component parts prohibited it. Sebelius said, "Pieces of the puzzle are *necessarily* tied together if you have a comprehensive approach." In other words, Obamacare's "comprehensive approach" requires one of two results: comprehensive acceptance or comprehensive repeal.

In his closing statement at that health summit, Obama said that if Republicans couldn't get on board with his approach, "then I think we've got to go ahead and make some decisions, and then that's what elections are for."

Indeed. And now, after an election in which the Republicans rode a wave of anti-Obamacare sentiment to their largest House gains since before the release of *Gone with the Wind*, they aren't about to accept Obamacare as a permanent fixture of American life—and neither is the citizenry that elected them. If an architect gives you a horrible plan for a house you didn't ask for, can't afford, and don't want to live in, you don't work with the architect to change the color of the paint or modify the placement of a closet—especially when the foundation hasn't yet been poured. Rather, you fire the architect and get to work on replacement plans for something far more livable and affordable.

The American people couldn't fire the principal architect in November, but they did the next best thing. They canned members of his party and empowered House Republicans who, of course, have now passed a full repeal bill—by a 56-vote margin, 8 times as large as the 7-vote margin by which Obamacare squeaked through the previous Democratic House.

But while Americans want repeal, they don't *just* want repeal. And thus the House Republicans are now confronted with their greatest challenge—and opportunity—in the whole span of the health care debate. They need to show the American people that the choice is not between Obamacare and nothing. They need to provide a meaningful, sensible alternative to Obamacare's comprehensive failings.

The American people want three main things out of health care reform: They want health costs to drop. They want the number of people with insurance to rise. And they want to make sure that people with expensive preexisting conditions aren't going without medical care. Republicans can deliver on all three counts.

There are also many things that Americans *don't* want out of health care reform: the loss of their health care plans; reductions in medical innovation; a decline in the quality of care; massive increases in federal spending and debt; the government injecting itself into the doctor-patient relationship; eventual federal rationing. Republicans can avoid following in Obamacare's ominous footsteps on each of these counts.

The Republican plan should emphasize three relatively simple things: lowering health costs, stopping the tax code from discriminating against the uninsured, and funding state-run community ("high-risk") pools. A GOP plan that did these three things would be scored by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) as cutting costs and adding on the order of 10 million people to the ranks of the newly insured.

(1) Lowering health costs. The health plan released by House Republicans in late 2009 already provides the framework for lowering costs. It would allow Americans to buy health insurance across state lines; allow small businesses to pool together to buy insurance; allow private entities greater latitude in following the Safeway cost-cutting model of offering lower premiums for healthier lifestyles; prevent runaway malpractice lawsuits, which

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lead doctors to practice costly defensive medicine and thereby substantially raise health costs for everyone; and make it easier to use pre-tax Health Savings Accounts (in connection with real insurance, used to cover unforeseen expenses, not routine care)—which let people control their own health care dollars, shop for the best values, and pay for care directly—rather than providing a tax break only for those who funnel their money through insurers.

The CBO has estimated that the 2009 Republican plan would lower premiums by 5 percent to 8 percent on the open market, while Obamacare would raise them by 10 to 13 percent—a massive difference. The CBO says that, on the open market, Obamacare would increase premiums for the average family by $2,100 per year, while the Republican proposal would reduce families' premiums by nearly $1,000 per year. That's a difference between the two alternatives of about $3,000 a year per family. In the small-group market, the CBO says that the Republican plan would likely lower premiums by more than $1,000 a year per family from their projected level under Obamacare. So, over the course of a decade of living under the Republican plan, versus living under Obamacare, the average American family would save about $30,000 in health insurance premiums for plans purchased on the open market and about $10,000 for those purchased in the small-group market.

(2) Stopping the tax code from discriminating against the uninsured. The Obama administration repeatedly abuses the word "discrimination" when talking about health care. It is not "discrimination" for insurance companies to charge more for those who cost more: That is how the insurance business works and has since the Renaissance. But the federal tax code truly does discriminate, and that's how Republicans ought to talk about it: It offers tax breaks for health care to Americans who get health insurance through their employers, but none to uninsured Americans who try to buy policies on the open market. Therefore, unlike nearly everyone else, the uninsured have to buy insurance with after-tax dollars, meaning that their real costs for insurance are much higher than everyone else's.

This is a simple issue of fairness, and Republicans should propose to fix it. Why not fix what the government is already doing wrong, rather than rewarding it by giving it control over the whole health care system?

At the same time, Republicans need to remember that they have far fewer allies in the press corps than the president, and they don't have his microphone. Any change Republicans propose that can possibly be portrayed as threatening the preexisting employer-based insurance of millions of Americans will be mischaracterized to instill fear. So the GOP needs to make crystal clear that its proposal *would not change the tax status of employer-provided insurance one iota*. A major overhaul that did do this, while arguably good policy, would be better suited to a presidential campaign.

For the time being, the GOP should take a more incremental, conservative approach. It should roughly level the playing field by giving refundable tax credits to the uninsured (and self-insured) for use only in buying health insurance. A sensible credit would be $2,000 per adult and $500 per child, with a maximum of $5,000 per family. In this way, all Americans—and not just those with employer-provided insurance—would get a tax break on health insurance. Stopping the tax code from discriminating against the uninsured would also inject much needed life into an insurance market that at present lacks vibrancy and competitiveness.

(3) Funding state-run community ("high-risk") pools. Having failed on costs and having found that talking about the sheer number of uninsured gains them only so much political mileage, the Obama administration and congressional Democrats have now made the preexisting-condition issue the centerpiece of their Obamacare sales pitch. In reality, however, almost no one has yet been helped by Obamacare. The requirement that insurers cover all comers at the same price, which is the ticket to higher premiums for everyone else, isn't scheduled to go into effect for three more years.

Most of the Democrats' examples of the reputed beneficiaries of Obamacare involve those enrolled in its high-risk pools. The Medicare chief actuary had estimated that 375,000 people—about 0.1 percent of the population—would sign up for those pools by New Year's. Instead the Department of Health and Human Services managed to sign up only 8,000 people. Why didn't folks sign up? Like the rest of Obamacare, these pools are poorly designed: They're overregulated, they mandate overly expensive benefits, and (as a result) they charge excessively high premiums. Also, they are underfunded and designed to be short-term, so they—again, like Obamacare as a whole—create great uncertainty and offer little incentive for people to drop out of their current arrangements to join up.

Admittedly, some people (about 1 out of every 35,000

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Americans) have been helped by these pools. But a lot more could be helped by better designed, less expensive, less heavily regulated, more locally controlled pools.

Such community pools—"high-risk" is a misnomer, as John R. Graham and John Goodman have noted; these pools are for people who are high *cost*, not high risk—would be designed and run at the state or local level. They would provide public funding to help cover the cost of insuring people with prohibitively expensive preexisting conditions. To keep people from gaming the system and signing up for insurance only after they're sick, such plans should ideally cost their recipients more, not less, than most people pay in health care premiums—though far less than such plans would cost on the open market (if they were even available). They should also offer a meaningful, sensible range of benefits; being publicly subsidized, they shouldn't be Cadillac plans. Such community pools would provide an important safety net for those who otherwise couldn't get coverage. But they would not throw a net over the entire health care system and everyone who's affected by it, as Obamacare would.

The CBO has estimated that the 2009 House Republican health bill would provide a surplus of about $75 billion over 10 years in relation to pre-Obamacare spending projections. That bill didn't include a proposal to stop the tax code from discriminating against the uninsured, but judging from its scoring of a similar provision, the CBO would likely score such a proposal as increasing spending (through refundable tax credits for people who don't pay that much in taxes) by something in the range of $100 billion over 10 years. James Capretta and Tom Miller have estimated that funding the community pools would probably require about $150-$200 billion, or about $125-$175 billion more than the 2009 House bill allocated. To take the midpoint of Capretta and Miller's range, this would require finding about $175 billion over a decade ($150 billion, plus $100 billion, minus $75 billion) to reach deficit-neutrality.

A great deal of federal funding, in the form of Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH or "dish") payments, goes to reimburse hospitals for treating the uninsured in emergency rooms. The argument, made repeatedly by the Obama administration and others, is that if we can just get people insured—as this proposed plan would do—we can get them out of emergency rooms and save money in the process. The CBO has already scored a proposal to convert some DSH funds into block grants to states. With fewer uninsured, fewer DSH funds would be needed. Starting the block grants at 75 percent of each state's current federal DSH funding level, reducing them by 5 percent annually until they reach 50 percent in year six, and then indexing them to the consumer price index minus 1 percentage point, could likely generate roughly $175 billion, offsetting the $175 billion figure cited above.

Beyond that, the tax credits would likely reduce revenue (as opposed to increasing spending) by about $100 billion. True, this $100 billion would become deficit spending—but deficit spending resulting from a tax cut. It would represent, moreover, only a fraction of the $341 billion that the CBO estimates Obamacare would add to the debt (through its effect on Medicare and its implementation costs). In all, the Republican proposal would cost some $300-350 billion in its real first decade (about $60 billion for the provisions in the 2009 GOP bill, $150 billion more for community pools, and $100 billion in increased spending, in addition to another $100 billion in decreased revenue, from tax credits). That's about 15 percent as much as Obamacare's $2.3 trillion.

True, the Republican bill could follow Obamacare's lead and in its real first decade increase taxes by about $1 trillion and siphon close to $1 trillion out of Medicare, and thereby (unlike Obamacare) become a huge budget surplus bill. But that would hardly be the responsible course.

All of this brings up a key point: Republicans shouldn't be overly skittish about putting forward a replacement bill that would moderately increase the deficit. No one outside of the Obama administration and its core allies believes that Obamacare would do anything other than explode federal spending, deficits, and debt. The American people have no illusions to the contrary. They aren't going to believe that the Republican bill is less fiscally responsible than Obamacare is. But they will believe (if given reason to believe it) that the Republican plan isn't serious about covering the uninsured. So the Republicans need to be scrupulous on that point.

Each of the three parts of this proposed plan addresses an essential aspect of Americans' health care concerns. If any part is missing, you can bet the Obama administration will mercilessly focus on its absence like the missing leg of a three-legged stool, likely toppling the GOP proposal in the process. The *New York Times* will once again say (as it said of the last GOP offering) that it's a "paltry effort," providing "scandalously" little help for the uninsured. But if all three legs are securely in place, and the Obama administration is left to fight this battle on the ground of deficits and spending, the administration will lose.

The stakes are high for the Republican party and the nation. The American people clearly want to trade in Obamacare. But the Republicans need to give them something compelling in exchange. ♦

Yes, They're Overpaid

The truth about federal workers' compensation

By Andrew G. Biggs & Jason Richwine

"Scapegoating," claimed the American Federation of Government Employees. "Punishment," said the Federal Managers Association. "Transparently cynical," declared Paul Krugman. President Obama's late November announcement of a two-year pay freeze for federal workers has been poorly received by unions and left-wing activists, who see it as the end result of a year-long campaign to reduce federal salaries. Taxpayers should hope it is just the beginning. Fundamental reform of federal pay would save tens of billions of dollars annually, and it would be a strong indication that lawmakers are serious about reducing long-term deficits in all parts of the budget.

Unfortunately, the debate over federal pay has been fraught with extreme claims. Some politicians have accused federal workers of making double what they deserve, while government unions maintain they are *underpaid* by around 25 percent. The rhetorical back and forth has largely hidden a substantial academic literature, dating back to the 1970s, that compares the pay of federal and private workers. Economists have addressed the issue with a variety of techniques and from a number of different angles. Over the past year, we have worked to update their results with the most recent data, and our conclusions have been the same as theirs: Federal employees do receive a substantial wage premium by comparison with similar private workers.

The standard approach to comparing the salaries of different groups is to employ the "human capital model," which assumes that workers are paid according to their skills and personal characteristics. If any group differences in wages remain after controlling for age, education, experience, race, gender, marital status, immigration status, state of residence, and so on, then one group is said to enjoy a wage premium over the others. Economists using this approach find that federal workers generally earn wages 10 percent to 20 percent higher than comparable private sector workers. When we ran a similar analysis with 2009 wage data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), the result was a 12 percent premium. James Sherk of the Heritage Foundation found that the federal premium today could be as much as 22 percent, depending on the specific control variables employed. In general, the federal pay premium is very large for lower and middle-skilled employees and shrinks for the best-qualified federal workers.

Because we have datasets like the CPS—large, representative samples of American workers providing abundant demographic details—the human capital method is the best and most widely accepted method of comparing pay across groups. But the method does have some limitations, which defenders of federal pay use to cast doubt on these results. The press often has obliged by portraying the pay debate as a he-said, she-said question that can never really be answered.

It's useful then to approach the federal pay question from more than one angle. For instance, we might ask whether economists' human capital model can really account for all of the relevant differences among workers. Perhaps federal workers have some personality trait—greater motivation, for example—that we cannot measure adequately with our standard control variables. Or maybe our "years of education" variable disguises more prestigious degrees held by federal workers. Neither of these hypotheses seems particularly likely, but we can't falsify them with the standard human capital model. It's not feasible to measure directly every single human capital trait.

To address this concern, we can change the approach. Rather than comparing different people at one point in time, we can follow the same people *through* time. Workers frequently change jobs, and sometimes they switch between federal and private sector jobs. Their change in wages when they make this switch can tell us a lot about federal pay. If workers get a much bigger raise when they switch from private to federal employment than workers who switch from one private job to another, we can infer that the federal government overpays.

Following individuals over time builds into the analysis an ideally rich set of control variables. When people change jobs, they bring with them not just their observable skills like work experience and education, but also their intelligence, their motivation, their specific training,

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and whatever else affects their productivity. We need not directly measure these variables. All are naturally controlled for when we compare the change in wages people experience when switching between the federal and private sectors.

The specific econometric procedure is called "fixed effects," because it focuses on wage changes for individual workers, who have many characteristics that are fixed from year to year. One of the first economists to apply fixed effects analysis to the federal pay issue was Princeton's Alan Krueger in 1988. Using a dataset called the Displaced Workers Survey, Krueger found that workers who lost jobs in the private sector and then joined the federal government earned about 12 percent more than displaced workers who found another private sector job. (Somewhat ironically, Krueger would go on to become President Obama's chief economist at the Treasury Department.)

A forthcoming Heritage Foundation report updates Krueger's analysis using a much larger and more representative dataset known as the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). The SIPP follows tens of thousands of people over several years, carefully documenting their wages and labor force status on a monthly basis. Combining the SIPP waves that began in 2004 and 2008, the fixed effects analysis indicates a federal wage premium of at least 8 percent.

A similar approach confined to postal workers reached a similar conclusion. In the late 1990s, the Postal Service surveyed all new hires, asking them how much they were paid in their previous job. Overall, new postal hires received salaries over 28 percent higher than what they had been paid in the private sector, which University of Pennsylvania law professor Michael Wachter and his coauthors called "enormous wage increases over their previous wages in full-time private sector jobs."

If fixed effects analysis works so well, why use the human capital method at all? Because fixed effects analysis has its own limitations. For one thing, the smaller samples make measurement error more of a problem. If some private workers are incorrectly identified as federal workers or vice versa, then the federal wage premium will appear smaller than it really is. Furthermore, the SIPP covers a relatively small part of a worker's life cycle. We know from the human capital studies that the federal premium tends to get larger as experience grows. Since the SIPP data capture pay in only the first year a worker switches to federal employment, the observed 8 percent pay premium probably underestimates the overall pay gap.

Human capital and fixed effects models tell us a lot about wages in the federal versus the private sector, but they tell us nothing about nonwage compensation. To supplement the findings on wages, analysts commonly estimate the value of pension and health benefits offered by each sector and then add them to the wage results from the human capital model. But even this is incomplete, because benefits come in many forms that can be hard to quantify. Even a low-salary job without a 401(k) or a health plan could be relatively attractive if it offered other forms of compensation, such as generous sick leave, lengthy vacation time, reliable job security, and flexible scheduling. Federal employment offers all of these, but how do we incorporate every perk into the federal-private comparison?

One method is to use quit rates. Federal workers quit their jobs at less than one-third the rate of private workers, which suggests federal employees don't feel they can get a better combination of salary, benefits, and job perks in the private sector. Just as fixed effects naturally accounts for many hard-to-measure skill differences, quit rate analysis automatically encompasses the full range of compensation in each sector.

For years, defenders of federal pay have attributed low quit rates to the fact that federal employees receive traditional defined benefit pensions, which reward long job tenure and discourage midcareer employees from leaving. Richard Ippolito, the author of a 1987 study that made this claim, suggested what he called a "litmus test" for his theory: Switch federal employees from traditional defined benefit to 401(k)-type defined contribution plans, then see if quit rates change. "If federal workers are paid too much relative to their quality level," Ippolito wrote, "the quit rate will not change much; if their pay is too low, the quit rate will increase markedly."

As it happens, history has provided this test: While federal employees hired before 1984 have only defined benefit pensions, those hired after 1984 have a smaller defined benefit pension coupled with a defined contribution plan. If the pension job lock theory were correct, quit rates today should be much higher than in 1984. In fact, precisely the opposite is the case: Quit rates among federal workers hired after 1984 are actually around 30 percent *lower* than for similar workers in 1984. This casts serious doubt on the claim that the structure of federal pensions, not generous overall compensation, explains the small number of federal employees who leave their jobs.

Just as few federal employees quit their jobs, many private sector workers seek federal employment, seeing it as both well compensated and secure in a time when many private sector jobs are not. While data on the number of applicants per federal or private sector job are scant, research in the late 1980s indicated that federal jobs on average received 25 percent to 38 percent more applicants than private sector positions. A 1985 study by economist

Steven Venti concluded that from 18 percent to 29 percent of workers would accept federal employment if offered. Roughly three times as many men would be willing to accept federal employment as are actually offered federal jobs; for women, the ratio is six times, implying that federal jobs provide a significantly more attractive overall package than private sector options.

These results, Venti concluded, suggest "the government could continue to attract a workforce of current size with substantially lower wages." Moreover, even significantly lower wages would only slightly reduce the quality of federal job applicants. We will have the opportunity to test this view as the administration's pay freeze takes effect. Will federal quit rates rise as pay is frozen? We doubt it.

The left often portrays any criticism of public sector employees as an attack on government, unions, or working Americans. In addition, they say, even if claims of overpayment are true, the numbers are small relative to looming deficits from entitlement programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

But this misses an important point: If ordinary Americans are to accept significant sacrifices in programs that are dear to them, they need to know that there isn't a protected class receiving better treatment.

A number of studies of fiscal consolidations in OECD countries over the past several decades have shown that reductions in the government wage bill—that is, the size and pay of the public sector work force—are an important part of larger efforts to balance the budget. A recent study published by the American Enterprise Institute showed that countries that succeeded in reducing their fiscal gaps placed a lot of weight on reducing public sector pay.

One reason is that reducing the public workforce shifts resources to the private sector, where they are almost certainly better utilized and so benefit the economy. A second, and probably more important, reason is basic credibility: When a government is willing to take on entrenched interests, it demonstrates to both citizens and financial markets that it is serious about reform. Individuals are more willing to invest when they feel confident their taxes will not rise in the future, and lenders are more willing to purchase government debt when they know it can be paid back.

A 1996 International Monetary Fund study concluded: "Fiscal consolidation that concentrates on the expenditure side, and especially on transfers and government wages, is more likely to succeed in reducing the public debt ratio than tax-based consolidation." Given the size of the fiscal gap the federal government must close, it seems foolish to leave the government wage bill out of the equation.

The devil is in the details. Cutting or freezing federal pay across the board would be an improvement over the status quo, but more fundamental reform is needed. Without a change in the basic system of setting pay, salaries could easily creep upward again with little fanfare. In addition, we do not want to cut the wages and benefits of certain federal workers—research scientists, engineers, and senior lawyers, for example—who are not currently overpaid.

We could offer some specific proposals—cutting down on excessive vacation pay and phasing out the defined benefit pension come to mind—but more important for now are the principles a new system should follow. Rather than a rigid pay schedule, the federal government should attempt to at least approximate the effects of supply and demand that private labor markets exhibit. While academic studies can attempt to account for differing salaries, benefits, job security, and work conditions, the ultimate test is the market itself, where job seekers compare the overall package offered in federal employment with the offer from private employers. Probably the best way to capture market effects is to track the number of applications submitted for a given federal job. When large numbers apply for a position, that is a signal that the compensation package may be overly attractive; likewise, when a federal position attracts few applicants—and many high level positions do—then better pay may be warranted. But to act as if a small number of salary-setting bureaucrats can accurately set pay and compensation for thousands of jobs of different types is folly, which hurts taxpayers and reduces the effectiveness of the federal workforce.

The question of whether federal workers are overpaid is often portrayed in the media as unanswerable, with each side of the debate citing its own numbers. In fact, the academic evidence is much more one-sided: Generally speaking, federal workers do receive higher salaries than similar private employees; individuals changing jobs receive bigger pay increases when their new job is with the federal government; federal employees quit less than private workers; and private workers line up to get federal jobs.

Fundamental reform of federal compensation—not merely temporary pay freezes or furloughs—could offer significant benefits to taxpayers. At the same time, we must acknowledge that there is no perfect solution. No amount of "good government" reforms can ensure that federal workers are paid exactly the same way as their private sector counterparts, because the federal government can never be subject to market forces the way the private sector is.

Taxpayers should recognize that bureaucratic inefficiencies like excessive pay are part and parcel of large government. Reform of the pay system is important and necessary, but ultimately the best means of reducing excessive federal paychecks is to reduce the size of the federal government. ♦

Irving Kristol, 1976

The Great Persuader

The wisdom and wit of Irving Kristol.

BY JAMES W. CEASER

This volume of 48 essays by Irving Kristol, drawn from a writing career that spanned nearly three score and ten years (1942 until 2009), is intended as much to reveal the author's intellectual disposition as to illuminate the content of the neoconservative persuasion that Kristol founded. Selected and introduced by his wife Gertrude Himmelfarb, the collection provides a wealth of material, all but one essay previously uncollected, for forming an intellectual biography, even as the touching foreword by William Kristol offers revealing glimpses into his father's personal character.

The Neoconservative Persuasion
Selected Essays, 1942-2009
by Irving Kristol
Basic Books, 416 pp., $29.95

The portrait of an essayist as a young man begins in 1942 with a little gem on W.H. Auden written by one "William Ferry," the party name our author assumed as a young Trotskyist. The essay appeared in the inaugural edition of *Enquiry: A Journal of Independent Radical Thought*, which the enterprising author, at a mere 22 years of age, helped to launch. Here is a first sign of one of the author's most notable traits: He was an intellectual entrepreneur. Establishing new journals was to become almost a habit, as he would go on to play a central role in beginning three of the most important intellectual journals of the second half of the 20th century (*Encounter*, *The Public Interest*, and *The National Interest*). Where another celebrated editor, Horace Greeley, once offered the advice "Go West Young Man," Kristol, in a kindred expression of rugged individualism, later dared others to "Start a Magazine."

As much as our author's political standpoint would change over the years, shifting from a variant of Marxism to a variant of liberalism before embracing a new variant of

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conservatism, it is the continuity of certain intellectual characteristics that Himmelfarb emphasizes. She labels the main trait, quoting some typical Kristolian irony, as the "neo-gene," as if it were nature, not nurture, that explained the author's subsequent development. In the family's usage, "neo" does not mean "new," still less "post," but something more like independent, critical, slightly heterodox, or perhaps even skeptical—except that Kristol was also skeptical of skepticism. "The quality of doubt" (the subtitle of the Auden essay), while it is a constant companion of a thinking person, can also paralyze the actor in politics (think of Hamlet), so it cannot be a final standpoint:

> To elevate doubt into a political program is distinctly impracticable, having the common consequences of accepting the status quo as a sure good contrasted to all kinds of future imaginable evils.

"Neo" politics involves both doubting and acting.

Readers of the Ferry essays of 1942-43 have an enormous challenge in front of them. The context out of which they spring—the world of New York intellectuals of the time-—is as inaccessible to us today as the world of Massachusetts Puritans in the 17th century. Was it possible, really, that so many thinkers, the *crème de la crème* of the intelligentsia, could, on the basis of what they deemed objective social science, follow a party line, and not only profess but believe in the coming wholesale transformation of the human being? (In one essay, Lionel Trilling is quoted summarizing Lenin's pragmatic decision to "postpone the problem of what man is to become until such time as he might become *anything he chose.*") The Puritan's belief in the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God almost seems realistic by comparison. Ferry wrote against a backdrop in which some erstwhile party members were beginning to question their faith, even as others were rushing to defend the orthodoxy and trying to force the wavering back into the fold.

Our author's intellectual DNA obviously rendered him constitutionally unfit for being an ideologue, and it was not very long before William Ferry became, and remained ever thereafter, Irving Kristol. In his first essay, which treats Lionel Trilling, Kristol sketched the core of his objection to Marxist doctrine:

> At the bottom of at least popular Marxism there has always been a kind of disgust with humanity as it is and a perfect faith in humanity as it is to be. It is this simplistic faith in perfectibility . . . which forgives in advance inhumanity disguised as humanistic zeal.

Kristol rejected the idea of unlimited plasticity, insisting that there was something permanent in the character of human beings and in the structure of social processes. He expressed this theme at the time less by reference to the philosophical category of "nature" (that which remains unchanging) than to the theological category of sin. Not sin, of course, in the sense of the judgment of an angry God holding his charges above the flames in the pit below, but in the sense of an "awareness of a subsistent evil" in human beings and of the recognition of the fact (quoting Trilling) that "good will generates its own problems." In starker terms of his own a few years later: "The horror that breathes into our faces is the realization that evil may come by doing good—not merely *intending* to do good, but *doing* it."

Talk about the law of unintended consequences! Long before Kristol was lamenting the unfortunate results of well-meaning Great Society welfare programs on family structure, he was contemplating the vaster problem of some of the unforeseen and disquieting effects of Enlightenment thought and technology on modern civilization, such as the advent of atomic weaponry and mass demagogy. Yet what Kristol ultimately took away from these ruminations was not an attitude of despair—this was against his genes, too—but a sense of moderation. At least for social policy, he called for a scaling-down of social programs to match human beings as they are, not as some would like them to be, and for making such improvements as are possible, not for designing grand schemes based on changing the whole environment. Kristol cautioned against a liberal optimism that ignored the natural limitations of human beings and the recalcitrance of social structures: "What it comes down to is that our reformers simply cannot bring themselves to think realistically about human nature."

It is always difficult to know whether it is a student's traits that lead him to select a mentor, or the mentor's teachings that shape the traits of the student. Kristol's case leaves the matter unresolved. The two figures Himmelfarb singles out as most important to Irving Kristol seem to have fit with and reinforced Kristol's existing "neo" gene, but they also channeled that gene in unforeseeable directions. The first was the aforementioned Lionel Trilling, who in the 1940s helped Kristol to develop his view of moral realism. The other was Leo Strauss.

So much has recently been written about Leo Strauss, a great deal of which is ideologically driven nonsense, that the revelation of Strauss's impact is bound to fuel further conspiratorial fantasies about the origins of the Iraq war. In vain will it be pointed out that Kristol first discovered Strauss in 1952, when George W. Bush was not yet seven years old and when Strauss was writing not about hidden WMDs but about esoteric teachings in Maimonides and Farabi.

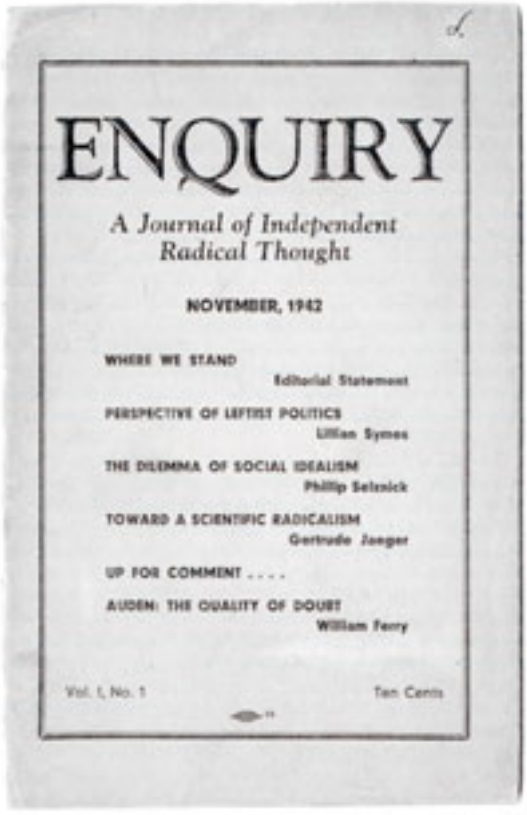
The lesson that Kristol derived from Strauss was something arguably far more important than a political stance. A key tenet of the progressivist theoretical viewpoint of the time was that past thought was best understood as preparative of present thought—that although (or because) we today stand on the shoulders of past thinkers (thank you very much), we are in the privileged position of being able to look down on them. Strauss's presentation of how to read old texts, and thus of what one could learn from them, challenged this premise, opening the door to an entirely new

theoretical stance: "If in time the victory goes to Professor Strauss, he will have accomplished nothing less than a revolution in intellectual history, and most of us will—figuratively, at least—have to go back to school to learn the wisdom of the past that we thought we knew." One can't get much more "neo" than this.

Kristol's intellectual encounter with Trilling and Strauss only begins to hint at the breadth of his intellectual interests in the decade from 1942-52, when he was writing mostly on literature, philosophy, and religion, not politics. For those of us (I count myself one) who until now had only known Irving Kristol the neoconservative writer, imagining that he must somehow have gone directly from wearing swaddling clothes to becoming a founding editor of *The Public Interest*, this volume is an eye-opener; and we can thank Gertrude Himmelfarb, by some uncanny fate nicknamed "Bea," for serving, like Dante's Beatrice, as our trustworthy guide.

What is clear from these writings is that Irving Kristol was often thinking beyond politics, appreciating its limits. As he notes in his "Autobiographical Memoir," he spent his first years at *Commentary* writing "only on philosophy, religion and occasionally on literature," never on politics. (My own "quality of doubt" led me directly to the fine bibliography of Kristol's work included in this volume, only to confirm this most surprising statement.) And yet, without having read most of the essays of this period, I still hazard the proposition that of the intellectuals writing at the time, Irving Kristol was at heart the most political of them all. For while so many others were applying their aesthetic or religious or philosophical premises *to* the political realm, treating it as if it were made in the image of these higher influences, Kristol was endeavoring to understand the political world as it was, on its own terms, making use of thought in these other domains to assist him in grasping the nature of politics.

Yet it was because Kristol appreciated the limits of politics that he also appreciated its depth. His explorations of other intellectual realms led him to see how powerfully they influenced and structured political life. The titles of so many of his essays, from "Capitalism, Socialism and Nihilism" to "Urban Civilization and Its Discontents" to "Utopianism, Ancient and Modern" illustrate the point. And contrary to what many claim about neoconservatism, usually for a political purpose of pitting an early and "pure" version of it against a later and "ideological" one, it was never limited to deploying genuine social science to unmask a politicized social science that promoted progressive objectives, important as this element was. Either Irving Kristol was the father of neoconservatism or he was not; and if he was, which all admit, then neoconservatism was from the first also about exploring the broad range of moral and intellectual factors that shape a liberal democracy. Neoconservatism sought to discover the ligature between culture and politics that would support and maintain a vital America. The term Kristol introduced to describe this task was "cultural statesmanship."


ENQUIRY

A Journal of Independent Radical Thought

NOVEMBER, 1942

WHERE WE STAND
Editorial Statement

PERSPECTIVE OF LEFTIST POLITICS
Lillian Symes

THE DILEMMA OF SOCIAL IDEALISM
Philip Selznick

TOWARD A SCIENTIFIC RADICALISM
Gertrude Jaeger

UP FOR COMMENT . . . .

AUDEN: THE QUALITY OF DOUBT
William Ferry

Vol. I, No. 1 Ten Cents

And by what kind of thinking, carried out by what means and in what venues, could this task be accomplished? Here, I think, we come to the book's title. "Persuasion" was not chosen haphazardly, but on the basis of a reflection, begun in an essay on Marvin Meyers's *The Jacksonian Persuasion*, on how ideas in America insert themselves most effectively into political life and exercise influence. Kristol considered "the strange destiny of ideas" in American politics, concluding that "what is most American in American politics" is the transmission of ideas through a mode of thought that is neither as formal or rigid as an ideology nor as loose or general as an ethos. A persuasion so conceived must be able to speak in the grain of the democratic spirit of the country, and it must be supple enough to move and adapt to changes that are part of politics.

An application of this "theory" comes in Kristol's treatment of some of the new strands of conservative populism that he encountered along the way, and which he accepted and welcomed into the conservative movement. Kristol would not brook being lectured to by thinkers feigning a concern for conservatism and shedding crocodile tears over its fall from a dignified version limited to quoting maxims from Edmund Burke. This group of salon intellectuals, still active today, would, in the name of "saving" conservatism, exclude from it people of faith because they are too religious, entrepreneurs because they wish to make too much money, and middle Americans because they are too patriotic. While Kristol acknowledged the dangers of populism, he also saw that

it can be a "corrective to the defects . . . often arising from the intellectual influence . . . of our democratic elites." Calling attention to a new fact of modern political life, he noted that the "people were conservative and the educated elites that governed them were ideological elites, always busy provoking disorder and discontent in the name of some utopian goal."

William Ferry, the genteel (and gentile) named Trotskyist, might not have been much interested in religious questions, but Irving Kristol surely was. Religion is the most important theme running through this collection, the focus of more essays than any other topic. Irving Kristol was not just a Jewish intellectual, but an intellectual who wrote about Jews, Judaism, and the Jewish Problem (Jews in relation to Christianity). He also discusses Christianity, especially American Protestantism and the foundational place of its covenantal theology alongside natural rights philosophy in the founding of the American republic.

Kristol's early essays on Judaism, written in the shadow of the Holocaust, contain some remarkable reflections on the long history of Jewish-Christian relations from the Middle Ages. His most original contribution, however, comes in his treatment of American Jews. He is the first to have had the insight and courage, for a Jew, to argue that, in America, the Jewish problem is a *Jewish* problem; Jews, by his account, have failed in thinking through clearly their own situation and determining how best to navigate some of the challenges they now face. His provocatively titled essay "On the Political Stupidity of the Jews" (1999) is only one of many that calls on fellow Jews to stop talking about *them* and start thinking about *us*. If ever (to mix Athens and Jerusalem) there is such a thing as a Jewish "gadfly," prodding and challenging his community at every turn, it was Irving Kristol.

Kristol's main critique is focused on the unreflective attachment of most Jews to the left. Strange as it sounds, this criticism is the furthest thing from a partisan plea—indeed, in his first statement of this theme (1948), he was still very much on the left. Kristol found the equation of Judaism with leftist political measures a perversion of the Jewish religion. Was one of the goals of Judaism, he asked, to be that "it permits its believers to read *The New Republic* with untroubled soul?" The silly pride and suffocating self-satisfaction that so many Jews experienced in voting and thinking left, as if these acts fulfill a divine "command" to do good, are obviously attitudes that did not die out in the 1940s; they were still going strong in 2008, in the ritual cleansing of bumpers before applying the sacred Obama-Biden stickers. Quite apart from such religious scruples, Kristol went on in our time to criticize Jews' political judgment in joining all too readily in disparaging evangelical Christianity and looking obsessively for signs of bigotry in every conservative religious organization or social movement. While Kristol knew full well that religious enthusiasm in the past was often accompanied with danger to Jews, he began asking American Jews in the 1980s to wake up to the "new world" in America, in which "Christians wish to be more Christian without necessarily being anti-Semitic." Parallel to this development has been the equally important fact, growing increasingly apparent, that a new form of hostility to Jews and Israel is far more likely to emanate from secular sources.

The power of Kristol's critique of this myopia in the American Jewish community is almost enough to lead one to despair, were it not for the fact that the history of the Jewish people has so often seemed to defy the lost cause. And so it is no mere fantasy to predict that the seed Irving Kristol planted here will become one of his greatest legacies. Although Kristol was himself cool toward the prophets—their expressions of messianic transformation reminded him too much of the Marxist science of the New Man—it is still fitting to cite Zechariah in his behalf: "The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit."

There is a strange term, "public intellectual," that enjoys much currency today, especially among those who like to claim the label for themselves. It refers to anyone who trades in ideas and holds forth in public, which, with the advent of blogging, is a much less exclusive group than it used to be. If there is to be any real distinction left to the term, it is best to consider adopting a less populist understanding and confine it to thinkers who have directly articulated or codified a major "public philosophy" or "persuasion" that has influenced the course of development in American politics.

Of public intellectuals so conceived, there have been only a handful: George Bancroft, whose famous *History of the United States* and orations sketched out much of the Jacksonian persuasion; John Dewey and Herbert Croly, the tandem who promoted progressivism; William F. Buckley, who helped revive conservatism; and Irving Kristol, father of the neoconservative persuasion. A comparison among these remarkable figures would obviously merit a study in its own right. So far as literary form is concerned, Kristol, unlike the others, never authored a full-length book; he stands out from this group by the extraordinary quality of his essays, which is a medium in which few other Americans were his equal. As for the overall character of thought, all of these men, being engaged in political commentary for a long period, shifted ground at points over their careers. Kristol, with his reflection on the idea of a "persuasion," was perhaps the least preoccupied with pure doctrine, seeking instead to keep the door of the conservative movement open to new influences and forms, while at the same time holding fast to core principles like cherishing the nation and respecting the limits of human nature.

Some of the schools will no doubt find his approach too eclectic, but the gene he implanted in his intellectual stepchildren has served the conservative cause and the nation very well. ♦

B&A

Healing Signs

Medicine is art, but now it's science, too.

BY AARON ROTHSTEIN

'The Agnew Clinic' (1889) by Thomas Eakins

Michael Bliss, university professor emeritus at the University of Toronto, medical historian, and honorary fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, begins this small book with a vignette about a disastrous smallpox outbreak in Montreal in 1885. This, he argues, was one of the last events of the premodern medical era, which was defined by superstitious and religious ideas as well as doubts about the powers of secular science.

By 1885, medicine had already taken some important steps forward, though: Methods of containing viruses like smallpox did exist. During the Montreal outbreak, Bliss recounts, the Board of Health made vaccination available to the general public, but much of the populace refused to get vaccinated because of anachronistic fears. Many people panicked about the mild side-effects of the shot, which included low fever and skin inflammation; ethnic tensions also contributed to a reluctance to get vaccinated. French Canadians believed that the vaccine was an "English notion" and was "being promoted and encouraged by the English as a race weapon against the French." Some health officials propagated what Bliss calls the "most insidious" of the anti-vaccination arguments: They believed that, instead of vaccinating the population, the city should simply maintain cleanliness in public areas. But this strategy is not an alternative to vaccination, as smallpox spreads through aerolized droplets from coughing and contact with scabs, clothing, and linens. Others relied on prayer to "stay the hand of the sender of the plague." Many of Montreal's Roman Catholics believed that the only way to fight smallpox was to renew one's devotion to God.

The Making of Modern Medicine
Turning Points in the Treatment of Disease
by Michael Bliss
Chicago, 112 pp., $18

Partly because of these hesitations, smallpox killed 3,164 Montrealers, 2 percent of the population, and 2,600 in the suburbs of Quebec, almost none of whom had been vaccinated.

This ignominious event in Montreal contained the last throes of an outdated ideology. Four years after smallpox dissipated in Montreal, our modern medical era began when the secular Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore admitted its first patient. Bliss rightly focuses on William Osler, a young physician on the Hopkins staff in many ways representative of medicine's coming-of-age. Although born into a religious family and what we might call a semi-religious man himself—Osler advised Yale students in 1913 to "learn to know your Bible, though not perhaps as your fathers did"—he retained none of the superstitions associated with religion. And his accomplishments were vast: Osler wrote his own medical textbook; he developed the clerkship system in America so that senior medical students could have more patient contact on hospital wards; and he expanded the intern system to create resident physicians and surgeons who could become specialists.

Harvey Cushing, a colleague of Osler's, similarly symbolized the new age of medicine: "Cushing," Bliss writes, "became the first surgeon who could access the human brain at will and with the near certainty of doing more good than harm." This was, Bliss asserts, surgery's first golden age, where patients could be cured of certain bodily disorders such as tumors and diseased nerves. Bliss also recounts the development of insulin during the early 20th century by Frederick Banting and his colleagues, J.B. Collip, J.J.R. Macleod, and C.H. Best. For the first time in the history of medicine, doctors could prescribe an effective treatment for diabetes.

Much of this is drawn from Bliss's previous books—*Plague: A Story of Smallpox in Montreal*, *William Osler: A Life in Medicine*, *Harvey Cushing: A Life*

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in Surgery, *The Discovery of Insulin*, and *Banting: A Biography*—and as he writes, this volume is meant to be a synthesis of what he has written "as a historian of medicine." The novelty of his work is in its argument about the "key turning point in our attitudes about modern health care." Indeed, Bliss's synthesis obviates the importance of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the history of medicine, but he never really explains *why* the developments of this time, both in attitude and discovery, are so much more important than other medical developments at other times.

After all, there are many findings which have been significant contributors to our modern medical age: What about William Harvey's discovery of the circulatory system in the early 17th century? Before this, scientists believed that blood was consumed by the body. Nearly all of our treatments today are based on the idea of circulation, that chemicals will be distributed throughout the body by our blood. The medical historian Paul Strathern has explained that the discovery of circulation of the blood "marked the beginning of modern medicine." And you could make the argument that the Catholic Church, in not objecting to cadaver dissection during dissection's inception in the Middle Ages, took a huge step in the right direction. Might superstition have begun to disappear during the first dissections allowed by the Church? And are we not still facing superstitious and pernicious ideas about medicine? The model/actress Jenny McCarthy has mounted a campaign against childhood vaccination because she believes it causes autism—despite the absence of any evidence for this, except outright fraud.

Bliss does not explain why, if this 20th-century shift was so singular, it occurred in the first place. But *The Making of Modern Medicine* does give us a valuable perspective on medical progress. Physicians have incredible healing powers—surgery to repair limbs and hearts, medications which can raise or lower blood pressure, life-saving blood transfusions—and there are still more incredible developments to come. And yet, a cursory glance demonstrates that our advancement is not quite as substantial as we think. Take vaccination. Variolation, a less refined form, was used in China during the Song Dynasty (960-1279): A person's scabs would be blown into another's nose through a tube, thereby bestowing immunization against smallpox. Regardless of technological advancements, our strategy has not changed much since then. In order to immunize ourselves against viruses like smallpox, we inject patients with a small dosage of the virus. And amazingly enough, there is still no "effective treatment," Bliss claims, "for the destruction caused when the smallpox virus invades a human subject." So we still can't treat it, as was the case in Montreal in 1885, and we have not had enduring success against a plethora of other diseases and viruses, such as HIV, various cancers, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's, among many others.

We have come very far in medicine, but have still barely plunged into the depths of knowledge of medical science. Bliss quotes Osler, who said that modern medicine should be understood as "man's redemption of man." But to put too much faith in science is to turn science itself into a church and, as Bliss observes, this church has "no ultimate salvation to offer." ♦

B&A

Athenian Justice

Why did Socrates have to die?

BY PETER LOPATIN

In 399 B.C., in a prison cell in Athens, a man—convicted and sentenced to death a month earlier by his fellow Athenians for the crimes of impiety and corrupting the young—was handed a cup of poison hemlock by his jailer. After upbraiding his weeping friends for their shameful display of unmanly grief, he raised the cup to his lips and calmly drank. A few minutes later, Socrates was dead.

The Hemlock Cup
Socrates, Athens, and the Search for the Good Life
by Bettany Hughes
Knopf, 528 pp., $35

The image of his serenity and resolve in the face of death at the hands of his fellow citizens continues to exert a powerful tug on our imaginations and sympathies, 2,400 years after the fact. Since antiquity, readers of Plato's dialogues—which constitute the principal source of our knowledge of Socrates' life and teachings—have sensed something of enduring importance in the character and conduct of the man. The central images bequeathed to us by the ancient texts still retain their vividness and emotive power: the vindictiveness of Socrates' prosecutors before a hostile Athenian court—and Socrates' compelling, yet somehow enigmatic *Apologia*—his calmness as he awaits his fate, talking with and questioning (always questioning) his closest friends. And the final image: that pivotal moment—on which so much seems to turn—as he quaffs the poison.

An insistent question continues to press itself on us and demand an answer: *What was it about Socrates, the philosopher-gadfly, that so egregiously offended Athens that its leaders felt justified in condemning him to death?* Or to pose the question differently (though it is, in fact, the same question, seen as it were through a glass, darkly): *What was it about Athens itself—the city we rightly refer to as the birthplace of democracy—that*

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needed *Socrates dead?* And perhaps most important: *Why does all this still matter to us today?*

Bettany Hughes is well known to British television viewers as the author and presenter of a number of programs on a wide range of historical topics. Her last book, *Helen of Troy: The Story Behind the Most Beautiful Woman in the World*, received considerable critical acclaim. In *The Hemlock Cup* she addresses the foregoing questions—and a great deal more as well. This is a lucid, erudite, and compelling work that brings Socrates and his city to life, offering a fresh and illuminating perspective on their times.

Although Hughes's familiarity with Plato's dialogues is evident, she writes as a historian, not a philosopher, and disclaims any intent to improve upon the vast corpus of philosophical commentary on Socratic thought. Her concern, rather, is to bring the figure of Socrates into sharp relief, to sketch "not a philosophical, but a topographical, map of the man." Hughes's attention to topography is not merely figurative, however: "This book aims, physically, to inhabit Socrates' Athens—not just as recorded and as promoted, but as lived and experienced." In pursuit of that aim, Hughes brings to bear an impressive knowledge of recent archaeological research as she seeks an understanding of the Athens that gave birth to (and killed) the one she boldly calls "the first ironic man on earth." She has, quite literally, turned more than a few stones in the effort:

> I have attempted to visit every site connected to Socrates' life and to pin down what it is that gives *cause* to his ideas, and what throws them into *context*. This book follows the coordinates that Socrates himself would have used.

Hughes's approach to historical topography is one she describes in overtly painterly terms: "[P]ainters will tell you that the truest way to represent a shape is to deal with the space around it." That space is the entirety of Athens and its environs in the fifth century B.C. Hughes sets about to delineate every significant contour and lineament of the city-state's political, intellectual, and social topography as it existed during Socrates' lifetime, and to place the philosopher in the landscape thus delineated, so as to shed light on the insistent questions that Socrates' life—and death

'The Death of Socrates' (1788) by Jacques-Louis David

—continue to pose. Hughes forthrightly states her purpose this way:

> My ambition is very simple: to re-enter the streets of Athens in real time. Not to revisit a Golden Age city, but to look at a real city-state that was forging a great political experiment and riveting a culture; a city that suffered war and plague as well as enjoying great triumphs. To inhabit a place that is at once absolutely recognizable and utterly strange. To breathe the air Socrates breathed.

A "simple" ambition, perhaps, but a grand one. Happily, however, Hughes never succumbs to grandiosity in its pursuit. The result is neither a dry work of academic historiography nor a historical travel log—long on color and short on content. It is, rather, a fruitful melding of informed and nuanced historical narrative and personal observation that succeeds marvelously in realizing its bold ambition. Hughes's determination to "inhabit" Socrates' Athens reflects her conviction that doing so is essential to an understanding of the circumstances of the philosopher's final days:

> To understand the tenor of Socrates' trial, its flavor, its taste, its smell, its surface tensions and its undercurrents, we must stand in the classical Agora, look around us, and see what Socrates would have seen as he made his journey through the streets and into the hallowed space of the law-courts.

This is an appealing, and ultimately successful, approach, but it is not without hazard. In attempting to inhabit the places and times where the events central to her narrative unfolded, Hughes can be a bit breathy as she tries to evoke what it all must have been like:

> We can perhaps imagine the stellar aristocrat Alcibiades standing one night on a high point in Athens and looking out across the crowded cityscape beyond the Acropolis to Piraeus bay and the dimpled lapping of the sea.

Well, we can perhaps imagine him, I suppose, but it seems a bit of a stretch. Similarly, attempting to evoke the atmosphere in Athens in 480 B.C. when, during a war with the Persians, conditions necessitated the evacuation of most of the city's population, Hughes confidently tells us: "Children were whimpering, women sweated with effort and fear." Well, yes, there might have been quite a lot of whimpering and sweating. And yet . . .

Or here, as she imagines the sights, sounds, and smells at the Isthmian Games:

> And imagine the other sounds here 2,500 years ago when a man like Socrates competed. Musicians tuning up for the added-attraction music

> festival would slowly drown out the sound of the bees and the passing birds; the tang of fat cooking and spitting on the hearth would swamp the smell of fresh sweat. The sound of running water, splashing into basins there to purify athletes and spectators alike, would soothe the nerves.

Although one may question whether understanding the tenor of Socrates' trial requires this much olfactory, auditory—and almost tactual—detail, its inclusion is unquestionably evocative. Moreover, such evocations—and they are numerous—are more than rhetorical ornaments, and are always contextually appropriate. While they are necessarily speculative, they reflect speculation informed by Hughes's solid command of historical and archaeological evidence and her boots-on-the-ground familiarity with the physical landscape of Athens and its environs.

The central fact about the Athens of 399 B.C. is that it was a city-state still traumatized from four generations of political turmoil, warfare, and plague. Hughes ably guides the reader through the convulsions of those times, ranging widely over the political, military, and social conflicts that wracked the city. The Athenians' bold and unprecedented experiment with direct democracy had proven, by turns, liberating and frightful, and always fragile. Athens was, in some sense, always at war with itself, and as Hughes so cogently elucidates, its democracy was not robust enough to endure the irritant of a man whose "single most plangent message [was] that there can be no good, even in a democracy, if each individual is not as good as he can possibly be."

In such an environment, it is hardly surprising that as Socrates walked the Agora, exhorting young men of high birth to think critically of the status quo—rather than simply buttress and perpetuate it—he aroused the suspicion and resentment of those in power. Here was a man who served his city as a soldier in combat, yet questioned the point of empire, a man who performed the requisite religious rites, yet claimed privileged access to the spiritual world through his personal *daemon*, and who—in a city that reveled in its wealth and opulence—chose to walk without shoes and was disdainful of wealth. As Hughes puts it:

> Socrates was a blot on the puff-filled, near-perfect city-state that Attic ambition was contriving to build. He encouraged men to humility rather than arrogance, to honesty rather than self-delusion. . . . His ideas were designed to stimulate, to provoke—and we all know how irritating, how needling that gadfly, that conscience-pricking gnat can be.

Because Socrates left no corpus of philosophical writings, all that we know of him is hearsay. He remains, necessarily, an elusive figure. And as to the question of why we still care—*and ought to care*—about his life and death, Hughes offers this observation:

> We think the way we do because Socrates thought the way he did. Socrates' belief that, as individuals, we need to question the world around us stands at the heart of what it means to live in "modern times." . . . Socrates stands at the beginning of our world—when democracy and liberty are first conceived as fundamental values of society. We need to understand him because he did not just pursue the meaning of life, but the meaning of *our own* lives.

There is, then, something very much at stake for us, today, in the effort to see Socrates' life and death more clearly. As one who "incarnates the tension between the freedom of the individual and the regulation of the community," he compels the attention of the modern democrat. And though he is elusive, we must continue to search for him:

> Socrates is recondite. And he is essential. He reminds us to keep debating the meaning of life, to keep questioning, to keep speaking to one another, to keep looking for answers. However you value him, you cannot argue with the central tenet of his philosophy. Because he beseeches mankind not to be thought-less. ◆

B&A

Craftsman Remembered

Wilfrid Sheed, 1930-2011.

BY JOHN SIMON

Wilfrid Sheed, who died on January 19, was a great critic, splendid essayist, and vastly entertaining novelist. Also a biographer (Clare Boothe Luce), autobiographer, popular music historian, and probably something else I am forgetting. "A utility man of letters," he called himself—and I would emphasize the "man of letters" part, a precious rarity nowadays. And one more thing: a great guy.

Sheed was the child of Francis Joseph Sheed and Maisie Ward, influential Roman Catholic publishers who brought out books by G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Dorothy Day, and Robert Lowell. Literature and Catholicism are what he grew up with, and his faithfulness to the former makes up for his loss of faith in the latter. Wilfrid—he was indignant about the poet Owen's "corrupt" spelling of his name as Wilfred—was also a great conversationalist with a wonderfully amused countenance impending elegant, charming, witty, and unfailingly perceptive talk. I remember chats with him that were equally stimulating in disagreement as in agreement,

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the sort of thing you can glean, for example, from his most famous novel, *Max Jamison* (1970).

This was thought by many to be a satire on a protagonist modeled on me, including a scene of violence that erupted at a critics' meeting between me and Brendan Gill. Sheed always staunchly denied this provenance, insisting that Jamison was really he himself, inasmuch as he had been a distinguished book critic and (briefly, for *Commonweal*) a provocative film critic. There was the embarrassing moment when, at a literary gathering at a downtown New York restaurant, I stood next to the formidable Miriam Ungerer, the second Mrs. Sheed, perched on a barstool. The first Mrs. Sheed had been a sweet Catholic girl who couldn't quite cope with all of Wilfrid's needs, made considerable by some of the lasting aftereffects of childhood polio. Thus I remember him going about with the middle button of his jacket hanging like an amulet from a necklace.

I asked Miriam why Bill (as he was known among friends) had not come to the party.

"Of course he has," she replied, pointing to the bald, taciturn man next to her, which is what the handsome Sheed had unrecognizably become. His speech was slurred because part of his cancerous tongue had been surgically removed. Ashamed of my gaffe, I extorted a promise from him of a reunion upon one of his rare visits from Sag Harbor to Manhattan. But I never heard from him. The master of scintillating conversation was evidently loath to inflict his impediment on a fellow critic.

Still he lived on, occasionally writing, until his death in the New England nursing home he had transferred to from his Sag Harbor one, to be near his wife living there with a daughter. Few, I imagine, had heard from him in the last years, while they were doubtless reading or rereading his novels, as well as the critical and essayistic writings collected in *The Morning After*, *The Good Word & Other Words*, and *Essays in Disguise*.

Wilfrid Sheed, 1970

Take, for example, the concluding words of "Kael vs. Sarris vs. Simon," an essay from his first collection about the so-called wars among film critics:

> Some people affect to be bored by all this professional infighting: not I. Criticism is a contact sport; and besides, who will criticize the critics if they don't jump each other?

When I wrote to him, foolishly protesting his mischievously cordial words, he answered me with, among others, these words: "I can't help feeling you have lost perspective both on yourself & your profession—something I am used to in Pauline [Kael] and Andy [Sarris], but hadn't expected in you."

Sure enough, Sheed never lost his sense of perspective, finding, for instance, "deplorable . . . fine sentence-by-sentence writing at the expense of form." Yet it seems to me he could never write a sentence that was not individually crafted as well as snugly fitted into a larger form. I tested this by randomly opening *The Good Word* and happening to alight on this sentence from an essay entitled "The Interview as Art":

> It is possible that the malice of writers has been overrated (by myself among others). Reading their ruminations on their craft, one sees why this writer could not possibly like that one, would indeed consider him a menace. Literature is a battleground of conflicting faiths, and nobler passions than envy are involved. Even those writers like Nabokov who are crabby by habit usually have a powerful aesthetic to back it up. (Nabokov's self-statute is chiseled so fine you can run your finger along the smirk.)

Could there be a stronger, yet perfectly spontaneous-sounding, image than the one in that parenthetic remark? Do not consign Sheed to the shade of oblivion.

Read him for what delights as sheer, sunny entertainment, but is, in the disguise of artful essayism, a maximum of useful common sense. ♦

LEONARD MCCOMBE / TIME & LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

Oscar's Curse

Advice to nominees: Be careful what you wish for.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

In a few weeks, it is all but certain that Natalie Portman, the exquisite 29-year-old who gave the year's most frightening performance in *Black Swan*, will collect an Oscar as best actress. The award will cap her uncommonly graceful transition from mature preadolescent (in *The Professional* and *Beautiful Girls*) to piece of human furniture in a special-effects blockbuster (the last three *Star Wars* movies) to hip indie-film princess (*Garden State*) to mainstream movie star. The only person to do it as seamlessly was Natalie Wood, and that was half a century ago. Since she is someone who has been working steadily in pictures for 17 years, the *Black Swan* Oscar would not only be in honor of her work in that movie, but almost a career capper, a Lifetime Achievement kind of thing. So it will be Natalie Portman's night.

The problem is, she would be far better off not winning—because there are few things worse for a present-day actress than having won an Oscar. The careers of Oscar-winning actresses tend to stall, freeze, go into reverse, or sputter out afterward. You've heard of the *Sports Illustrated* jinx? The Oscar jinx is just as devastating, only in this case, it affects women disproportionately. This is true for actresses both in the leading and supporting categories. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the Oscar doesn't poison the lives and careers of male winners in the same way, though it has been problematic for them, too.

Consider the following: Gwyneth Paltrow wins for *Shakespeare in Love* in 1998 after a hard-charging run for a couple of years with performances that dazzled everyone (in *Emma*, *Flesh and Bone*, *Sliding Doors*, and *Moonlight and Valentino*). And after that? With the exception of two deeply depressing turns, one as Sylvia Plath and the other as a possibly insane mathematician in *Proof*, this enormously talented and able actress has done nothing—nothing—of moment.

TODD WILLIAMSON / WIREIMAGE / GETTY IMAGES

Natalie Portman and Golden Globe

Charlize Theron, the spectacularly beautiful South African, was also having a terrific time in fare as varied as *The Devil's Advocate* and *The Italian Job* when she uglied herself up to win in 2003 as the serial killer Aileen Wuornos in *Monster*. Her career since has combined tiresome social-consciousness stuff (*North Country*, about sexual harassment) and bad superhero stuff (*Hancock*, with Will Smith).

Rachel Weisz, who was having a very interesting career starring in big-budget trash (*The Mummy*) and art-house junk (*Stealing Beauty*) won in 2005 in the supporting category for *The Constant Gardener* and promptly vanished. So, too, eight years earlier, did Helen Hunt, who won for best actress in *As Good As It Gets* and then seemed unable to find another job. Halle Berry won in 2001 for *Monster's Ball*, saw her part in an X-Men sequel boosted in size to take account of her new status, and then disappeared. (She tried to get back in the game this year with a multiple-personality part in a movie called *Frankie and Alice*, but she didn't score the Oscar nomination she was clearly praying for.)

Want more? Hilary Swank won two Oscars, in 1999 and 2004. Then, in case you like symbolism, she played Amelia Earhart. Julia Roberts, who was probably the biggest female star ever, won in 2000 for *Erin Brockovich* and then went nine years playing a few supporting roles before making two colossal duds, *Duplicity* and *Eat Pray Love*. Nicole Kidman put on a lot of makeup to play Virginia Woolf in 2002's *The Hours*, then made a lot of money for a few years until it became clear nobody in the world could stand the sight of her when she didn't look like Virginia Woolf. Renee Zellweger won a supporting actress Oscar in 2003 for *Cold Mountain*, which describes the condition of her career.

The most striking case is probably Reese Witherspoon. She won in 2005 for *Walk the Line* after supplanting Julia Roberts as the most bankable female star in Hollywood. And since? One PC movie (it was called *Rendition*, and aren't you lucky you never saw it) and two hideous comedies (*Four Christmases* and *How Do You Know*). She has a magical-realist 1930s circus movie coming out soon. That should kill off whatever is left of the delight so many people took in her winsome cleverness.

The Oscar seemed to induce pickiness, self-seriousness, and joylessness in these actresses, so that they either made bad choices or no choices at all. It may also have taken away the drive they had to strive and succeed, because they had reached the pinnacle and there was nowhere to go but down. Which is where they went.

So good luck on Oscar night, Miss Portman. Maybe you'll be lucky and lose. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

***The most talked-about story of the year is Amy Chua's* Wall Street Journal essay *"Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior."* —News item**

PARODY

REET JOURNAL

Why Sicilian Fathers Are Superior

'You can act like a man!'

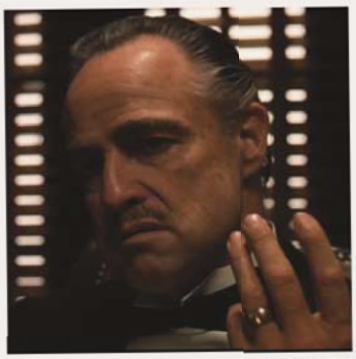
BY V. CORLEONE

A LOT OF PEOPLE wonder how Sicilian families manage to stay so tight-knit and loyal. Well, I'm a Sicilian father, grandfather, and godfather, and I can tell them. Here are some things my boys were never allowed to do:

- Become a Hollywood *finocchio* who cries like a woman.
- Tell anyone outside the Family what they were thinking.
- Ever take sides with anyone against the Family. Ever.
- Ever ask a second favor once he's been refused a first.
- Be in a school play.

I use the term "Sicilian father" loosely. I know some Jewish, Mexican, Japanese, and Hong Kong Chinese men who are Sicilian fathers, too. And I know some Sicilian men, almost always born in this country, usually sons who have forgotten their father while trying to kiss the *culo* of some *pezzonovante*, who are not truly Sicilian fathers.

Now, I do not judge. Fathers come in all varieties. It doesn't make any difference to me what a man does for a living. But I can say that studies show that Sicilian fathers, compared with non-Sicilian parents, spend about 10 times as much time teaching their offspring about the family business and are 20 times more likely to participate in a bring-your-son-to-work day. What Sicilian fathers understand is that no business can work if the bonds are not forged in blood or if its competitors are not wiped out through hard work.



One of the author's sons was banished to Las Vegas.

Sicilian fathers can get away with things that normal fathers cannot. Once, when I was young, a neighborhood don told me I was making good money and that he needed to wet his beak at my expense. I soon after paid him a visit at his home with a firearm and took care of his request forever. Then I spent the day with my wife and kids.

Non-Sicilian parents worry a lot about what people outside the family think. They worry that if their son says he is in construction or waste management, others might jump to conclusions. They worry that just the sight of a little drop of *sangue* will make him break down like a little girl. They worry that their son might not like all of the hard extracurricular activities required by a Sicilian father.

But here is a story in favor of Sicilian parenting. My youngest son wanted to be out of the family business. He even joined the Marines. I told him that was for saps. He didn't listen. But then my oldest son unwisely indicated to someone outside the family what he was thinking (I think his head had gone soft from the comedy he was playing with some young girl), and I found myself in a hospital recovering from unhappy gunfire. As it turned out, my youngest son had been listening to me after all. He returned to the family as a true Sicilian son. When the local police captain tried to leave me to my enemies, my youngest son moved my bed to a different room in the hospital. When my youngest son went to dinner with the police captain, my son surprised himself by carrying out a complex task, involving the retrieval of a weapon taped to a restaurant toilet. In his spare time, he even learned to play Jacques Ibert's "Little White Donkey."

There are many books out there portraying Sicilian fathers as overbearing. At the same time, many Sicilian fathers secretly believe that non-Sicilian fathers are limp-wristed *frocio* who should be raising girls instead of men. I think it is a misunderstanding on both sides. Both want the best for their children, but each has a different idea of how to do it. Non-Sicilian fathers want their sons to grow up to be *faccia di merda* and dance on the strings held by all of those big shots. Sicilian fathers want their sons to hold the strings, not be saps who risk their lives for strangers, refuse my friendship, or come into my house on the day of my daughter's wedding and treat me with utter dis-

Please turn to page A10