

**THE BLOG****Kos = DeLay**

By Marty Kaplan

06/25/2006 01:21 pm ET | Updated May 25, 2011

The moral equivalence canard is quacking again.

You can hear it in conservative David Brooks's Sunday New York Times column (sub. req.), an attack on DailyKos.com founder Markos Moulitsas Zuniga, where he writes that Tom DeLay is Kos's "moral doppelganger."

The column is Brooks's opportunity to take sides in an internecine war between Kos (and others) and The New Republic (and others), whose ultimate subject is what it means today to be a progressive Democrat, though putting it that way may already be conceding too much to the New Republicans.

Not surprisingly, Brooks attacks Kos. His niche in the New York Times op-ed biome is to fight the GOP fight against Democrats, and that includes championing self-described centrist Democrats, who are useful idiots for the Republican majority, over the voices on progressive blogs. (If Brooks really believed that the lefty blogosphere is nuts, he'd be its biggest fan, as a strategy to encourage Democratic seppuku.)

Brooks's thesis about Kos is that "he has challenged his enemy and become it." In other words, Kos is DeLay. What's particularly odd about Brooks's hauling out this Pogo meme is that it's so pomo. It's usually conservatives who rag lefty postmodernists for claiming moral equivalence. If someone compares Palestinian suffering with Israeli suffering; if the Dobson crowd's theocratic agenda is compared with the Taliban's; if someone draws an analogy between Saddam's torture in Iraq and Rumsfeld's torture in Gitmo; if the Cheney cabal's "legal" abrogation of the Constitution is related to the National Socialist takeover of the Reichstag — whenever such a comparison is made, a phalanx of conservatives springs into action to denounce the fallacy of moral equivalence, the tyranny of the left's putative moral relativism, their alleged inability to recognize evil when they see it, and to distinguish it from good.

So it's quite a kick to see Brooks attempt to pull this one off. To be sure, it's sweet to see him use DeLay's name as a shorthand for badass badness. But now that DeLay's out, it's kind of safe to treat The Hammer as a singularity, an Abu Graibby bad apple, as though his position as Republican Majority Leader had no bearing at all, sir, no bearing at all, on the pervasiveness of Republican rot on the Hill, and the deliberate, systemic causes of it.

For Brooks to say that Kos is DeLay's "moral doppelganger," not only must Brooks have amnesia about Republicans; he also must willfully narrow the agenda of Kossacks — of the whole progressive blogosphere — to a power play.

Markos, he writes, “has managed to spread the gospel of Kossism far and wide, which is not really about ideas and philosophy. ‘I’m just all about winning,’ he has said.”

Again, forget the way that just-about-winning Republican Bismarcks, from Lee Atwater to Karl Rove, have historically transformed highbrow columnists of all political persuasions into slobbering, codpiece-sniffing towel-boys. Focus instead on this characterization: lefty blogs are “not really about ideas and philosophy.”

I suppose, if you’re David Brooks, you can read selectively enough among the progressive blogrolls and only encounter tactics and polemics. But to do so requires the kind of ideological zealotry that used to be called McCarthyism, before Ann Coulter gave it a good name, and the kind of intellectual blindness that Brooks and his conservative brethren are supposed to be protecting us philistines from. By implication, it also requires believing that the content streaming from corporate-funded right-wing ersatz think tanks, and from the wingnut zipcodes in cyberspace, is up to Kantian snuff.

It shouldn’t be surprising that Brooks has hugged the moral equivalence tar baby, as Tony Snow might put it. After all, when it comes to gaming the MSM, the right has turned moral equivalence into an art form. Even if 99 percent of scientists believe global warming is real, every talk show booker produces segments with one “side” facing the other, as though they merited equal weight. Even if reporters have no doubt what the facts are in any situation, they are obliged, by the moronic conventions of he-said/she-said journalism, to “balance” the truth about any topic with a counter-quote from Americans for Honesty, or Fair Play for Puppies, or whatever Concerned Citizens shill group has a letterhead and a list of journalists’ phone numbers.

In the end, playing the moral equivalence card is surely a dangerous game. After all, if Kos = DeLay, what does Brooks = ?

Follow Marty Kaplan on Twitter: www.twitter.com/martykaplan



Marty Kaplan 

USC Annenberg professor and Norman Lear Center director