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July 7, 2009

JACK SHAFER CHARGES A “CORRUPTING EFFECT” from *The Atlantic’s* “salons.” Plus, what they could learn from the CATO Institute.

But I’m not so sure. Erving Goffman wrote years ago about the importance of a “backstage” where people could say things that needed to be said, but in a non-public way. That backstage has steadily vanished ever since, a result of technology and changing mores. Maybe that’s good, but maybe we need a backstage space somewhere. Buck-raking off-the-record dinners may not be the way to do it, but Shafer’s insistence that *everything* be on the record seems wrong, too.

UPDATE: I suppose, as we’re heading for another round of Petty Blifil (the use of “ethics” as an offensive weapon, discussed in *The Appearance of Impropriety: How the Ethics Wars Have Undermined American Government, Business, and Society*) I should disclose again that, like Ed Morrissey, and a host of other bloggers, my Amazon links (like the one pimping my book immediately above!) generate referral fees in the form of a small percentage of what sells. Also like Ed Morrissey, I don’t do pay-per-post. (There’s somebody going around blog comment sections claiming I get paid to post links to *The Atlantic* and *Popular Mechanics*, but that’s not true. I link to them regularly — as to *Popular Science*, *Autoblog*, *Wired*, etc. — because they have a lot of stuff that interests me, and, hopefully, you.) On the rare occasions when people send me free stuff (aside from books, which get the “in the mail” books-received treatment), if I blog about it I disclose that. Would I disclose an off-the-record dinner with a bigshot? No, not if I promised not to. Would I arrange those dinners on behalf of advertisers for a fat fee? Doubtful, though the moral dilemma remains entirely abstract at this point

Posted at by Glenn Reynolds at 10:52 pm