



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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Disclaimer: The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet and may require registration or subscription to access if they are. Some of the original articles are syndicated and therefore may have appeared in other publications also.

22 August 2010

Dear Ms. _____:

Thanks very much for writing. I appreciate your thoughts.

I assure you, though, that you're mistaken in your conclusion that I am "a disgusting typical conservative corporate mouth piece." First, I truly am not conservative. Second, I very often speak out AGAINST policies that benefit corporations. (Whether or not I am disgusting is not for me to say.)

Contrary to your accusation, to recognize

(as I do in my offending blog-post) that statistical differences in the pay of men and women might well be the result of perfectly reasonable differences in the patterns of career choices typically made by men from the patterns of career choices typically made by women is not at all, as you describe it, "to tow [an] ignorant conservative line." For example, here's philosopher Peter Singer, who is no one's idea of a conservative or of an economic libertarian!:

"While Darwinian thought has no impact on the priority we give to equality as a moral or political ideal,

it gives us grounds for believing that since men and women play different roles in reproduction, they may also differ in their inclinations or temperaments, in ways that best promote the reproductive prospects of each sex. Since women are limited in the number of children they can have, they are likely to be selective in their choice of mate. Men, on the other hand, are limited in the number of children they can have only by the number of women they can have sex with. If achieving high status increases access to women, then we can expect men to have a stronger drive for status

than women. This means that we cannot use the fact that there is a disproportionately large number of men in high status positions in business and politics as a reason for concluding that there has been discrimination against women. For example, the fact that there are fewer women chief executives of major corporations than men may be due to men being more willing to subordinate their personal lives and other interests to their career goals, and biological differences between men and women may be a factor in that greater readiness to sacrifice everything for the sake of getting to the top." [Peter Singer, A DARWINIAN LEFT: POLITICS, EVOLUTION, AND COOPERATION (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 17-18]

Correct or not, people can - and do - without being mouthpieces of corporate America, or even favorably disposed toward free markets, believe that statistical differences in men's and women's pay are explained by factors having nothing to do with ill-intent, discrimination, or, as you say, "men/male power/domination over

women/female subservience/exploitation."

Thanks again for writing.

22 August 2010

Friends,

This 8-plus minute-long video, from PBS Newshour, featuring Matt Ridley is a must-see. So see it. Enjoy it. Learn from it.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqet1woKe98>

Rationally optimistic (or, at least less pessimistic than I'd be had I not read Matt's newest book),

22 August 2010

Editor, The New York Times
620 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10018

To the Editor:

Monique Morrissey wants to fix Social Security by forcing employers to "pay their share of the [Social Security] tax on their employees' full salaries" rather than on only the first \$106,800 of each employee's annual earnings ("Employers Should Pay Up," August 22). She illustrates by pointing out that, were her

proposal adopted, LeBron James's employer, the Miami Heat, would pay an additional \$900,000 annually in Social Security taxes.

Ms. Morrissey's scheme might or might not "fix" Social Security. Either way, though, these additional taxes would be paid in large part, not by employers, but by employees. Knowing that they must pay more to Uncle Sam for each employed worker, employers would offer wages and salaries lower than they offer with the current cap in place.

LeBron James might possess unique-enough talent to arm-twist an NBA franchise into ponying up an additional \$900,000 annually without reducing his take-home pay. It's doubtful, however, that ordinary accountants, high-rise construction workers, supermarket managers, and other employees whose annual earnings exceed the current Social-Security-tax cap will be as fortunate.

21 August 2010

Editor, Washington Times

Dear Editor:

So the Obama administration removed from the Department of Labor's website that agency's study that found differences between women's and men's pay as resulting, not from discrimination, but from different career choices made by each sex ("Gender pay gap reflects choices, not bias," August 21). Big deal. Politically opportunistic fact-filtering is a bi-partisan tradition as newsworthy as mosquitoes in summer.

But to those persons who believe that women are indeed consistently underpaid, boy do I have a deal for you! Start your own firms and hire only women. If it's true that women are consistently underpaid, you'll be able to hire outstanding employees by paying them more than the relative pittance they currently earn, while you still profit handsomely from employing them.

And that's not all. Being benighted male chauvinists, your competitors will not follow your example; they will stubbornly refuse to offer female employees wages commensurate with these women's productivity. You'll expand your

operations by easily hiring highly productive, formerly underpaid workers while your competitors - made stupid by prejudice - will shrivel into bankruptcy as they lose productive employees. You'll simultaneously corner the market, earn handsome profits, and raise women's wages. If you're correct that sex discrimination is rampant in today's labor market, you can't lose! So get to work!

21 August 2010

Editor, USA Today

Dear Editor:

Many Americans are confused over President Obama's faith ("Obama invites confusion about his faith," August 20). I, for one, am not at all confused about it - at least not about that species of his faith that affects me and nearly every other American outside of Mr. Obama's immediate family.

While I have no idea what Mr. Obama's theology is (and nor do I care), it's crystal clear that he has a fiery faith in his and his political colleagues' wisdom to legislate and regulate for what that faith assures him is the public good. His blind faith in the necessity and goodness of central commands - and his cocksure rejection of ideas that conflict with this faith - reveals not only an antediluvian ignorance of economics, but a magnitude of self-assurance found only in persons whose faith protects them from the uncertainties that arise by confronting facts with reason.

20 August 2010

Editor, The New York Times
620 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10018

To the Editor:

Highly critical of persons calling for deep cuts in government spending to reduce budget deficits, Paul Krugman describes such budget hawks as members of "strange and savage cults, demanding human sacrifices to appease unseen forces" ("Appeasing the Bond Gods," August 20).

Funny - that's exactly how I describe Mr. Krugman and others who call for deep cuts in our standard of living to reduce global warming. These climate hawks are indeed members of strange and savage cults demanding human sacrifices to appease unseen forces.

One difference, of course, is that we KNOW from actual experience that budget deficits can lead to inflation and other serious economic maladies. Climate hawks have no such evidence to back their predictions of calamities, especially in light of the excellent historical record of free economies to

innovate and to overcome countless problems once believed by "experts" to be insurmountable.

19 August 2010

Editor, Baltimore Sun

Dear Editor:

Vincent DeMarco thinks that among the justifications for Maryland's 'sin taxes' on cigarettes and alcohol is the fact that they "save lives" (Letters, August 19).

Let's grant that these taxes do, in fact, extend Marylanders' life-expectancies. So what? The lives of individuals are the property neither of any government nor of officious "public interest" groups such as the one that Mr. DeMarco leads. The life of each individual Marylander belongs to that individual. If he or she chooses to endure a higher statistical chance of dying sooner rather than later in order to enjoy smoking, drinking, hang-gliding, or gulping down gasoline it is no business of the state or of the likes of Mr. DeMarco and other busybodies.

Don't forget that Maryland's ringing motto is "The Free State" - not "The Long Life-Expectancy State."

19 August 2010

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
1211 6th Ave.
New York, NY 10036

To the Editor:

Edwin Rockefeller correctly criticizes antitrust by pointing out that it "is a religion carried on by a cult of professionals. It gives government officials the power to interfere whimsically with freedom of contract, frequently on behalf of losers" (Letters, Aug. 19).

I suggest one small correction to his otherwise superb letter.

Mr. Rockefeller mistakenly (but forgivably) identifies Microsoft Corp. as "the foremost victim of antitrust in our time." In fact, however, the foremost victims of antitrust, in our time and in times past, are consumers - the hundreds of millions of politically hapless men and women who are robbed of the lower prices and innovative products that they would have enjoyed had antitrust's "cult of professionals" not interfered in the dynamic market process in order to protect politically vocal

producer groups from
competition.

18 August 2010

Judge Andrew Napolitano
Freedom Watch
Fox Business Channel
New York, NY

Dear Judge Napolitano:

I very much enjoyed the debate over free trade that you recently hosted between Lou Dobbs and Tom Palmer.

Having read and reviewed Mr. Dobbs's 2004 book "Exporting America," I was, however, surprised to hear Mr. Dobbs deny that he's ever called even for one restriction that is protectionist. Looking surprised and wronged that Mr. Palmer accused him of being a protectionist, Mr. Dobbs protested self-righteously and loudly that he's no such thing.

Well now, you judge (pun intended). Here's a direct quotation from page 150 of Mr. Dobbs's book: "Should we simply hope that Corporate America will find a social conscience and voluntarily restrain its outsourcing to a minimum? Should we continue to permit the exportation of our knowledge base, technology, and capital to

other countries to provide the products and services for export back to America? Or should we rely on public policy, regulation, tariffs, and quotas to protect our standard of living?" This is not the only such quotation in his book.

To paraphrase the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Mr. Dobbs is entitled to his own opinions, but not to his own definition of terms such as "tariffs" and "quotas." These identify protectionist policies, and so Mr. Dobbs's call for these policies makes him a protectionist.

18 August 2010

Editor, Los Angeles Times

Dear Editor:

Harold Meyerson proposes that California's government implement an "industrial policy" ("Reviving California's economy: Meg Whitman versus Jerry Brown," August 18). As evidence of the wisdom of his proposal, Mr. Meyerson writes that "it was investments by Pat Brown, California's greatest governor, in the state's universities, roads and water systems that made the state's economy the

marvel of the world for much of the second half of the 20th century."

Whether or not such investments are best carried out by government, they are emphatically not "industrial policy." They are, instead, examples of government provision of what most economists - including Adam Smith - have long regarded to be "public goods." Unlike industrial policy, government provision of infrastructure and education does not override consumer choice in order to promote favored industries. Unlike industrial policy, the provision of public goods does not protect firms or industries from competition. Unlike industrial policy, the provision of public goods is not part of a plan to achieve specific, foreseeable, and targeted patterns of investment and employment.

The fact that government supplies a blank canvas does not imply that it is an artist capable of painting a pretty picture.

17 August 2010

Friends,

This week's debate at Economist.com is on the

question of whether or not government should regulate the pay of executives at private companies. Defending the principle that the pay of private employees is no business of government is Mark Calabria, Director of Financial Regulation Studies at the Cato Institute and a George Mason University economics PhD:

<http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/558&fsrc=nl>

17 August 2010

Editor, USA Today

Dear Editor:

Observing that suburban lawns consume land as well as other resources, Laura Vanderkam concludes that lawns are wasteful and environmentally destructive ("Out of fashion: Green lawns," August 17). Never mind that lawns are attractive and that they provide safe havens for children (and adults) to play in. Ms. Vanderkam has divined that suburbanites unthinkingly overvalue these benefits.

Newspapers - such as the one that Ms. Vanderkam writes for - consume trees, petroleum (in the form of

ink), electricity, and numerous other resources. Were I as confident in my knowledge and speculations as Ms. Vanderkam is in hers, I might divine that newspapers are an unfortunate "fashion" that we would be wise to avoid.

At any rate, anyone who DID conclude that newspapers aren't worth their environmental costs would stand on intellectual grounds just as sturdy - and just as barren - as those that Ms. Vanderkam stands on when she criticizes suburban lawns.

16 August 2010

Editor, WTOP Radio
Washington, DC

Dear Editor:

During today's noon hour your anchor interviewed an "expert" who argued that free trade is fine when the economy is at or near full-employment, but that protectionism is justified when unemployment is unusually high. The "expert" reasoned that protectionism creates jobs.

Nonsense.

If this "expert's" policy advice were sound, then why stop with

protectionism? During recessions government should (according to the logic of such reasoning) not only prevent American consumers from buying foreign-made products, but also prohibit American producers from using labor-saving technologies. For example, by prohibiting the use of computers, printers, and calculators, firms would be prompted to hire lots more typists and slide-rule-handling engineers. Or by outlawing the use of motor vehicles with more than two axles, shipping companies would hire many more drivers to carry goods to market in vastly expanded fleets of pick-up trucks.

Unless your "expert" agrees that protecting jobs from non-human competition (that is, technology) is good policy during recessions, he ought to rethink his notion that protecting jobs from human competition is good policy.

16 August 2010

Editor, The New York Times
620 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10018

To the Editor:

You assert that "The bulging American trade deficit means that rising consumer demand is flowing to suppliers overseas rather than fueling growth at home" ("Return of the Killer Trade Deficit," August 16).

Not so.

Why do foreigners accept green pieces of paper in return for the goods and services these foreigners produce for Americans? It's not because foreigners have an insatiable demand for tiny monochrome prints of dead American statesmen. Rather, foreigners accept dollars because they want to spend those dollars, either on American exports or on American assets. Another term for spending dollars on American assets is "investing in the American economy."

The U.S. trade deficit rises whenever the amount of dollars foreigners invest in the American economy rises relative to the amount of dollars foreigners spend on American exports. This investment - contrary to your claims - is perfectly sustainable as well as an activity that fuels demand in the U.S. economy. The U.S. trade deficit is nothing to fear.

16 August 2010

Editor, Baltimore Sun

Dear Editor:

Arguing that trade with foreigners helps foreigners and harms Americans, Alfred Funk asks rhetorically "Today I am wearing my Indonesian shirt and my pants from China. Do we really need an economist to tell us what's happening in our country?" (Letters, August 16). I humbly submit that the answer is yes. Contrary to Mr. Funk's allegation, when we Americans trade with foreigners we help not only the foreigners with whom we trade, we help also ourselves.

For evidence, look at Mr. Funk himself. Did he - an American - not benefit by buying the clothes he's wearing? Did he purchase his shirt and pants to help people in Indonesia and in China, or did he purchase these items to help himself? Would he prefer that he, and all other Americans, be obliged to pay higher prices for clothing (and for shoes, automobiles, cell phones, electric lamps, softwood lumber, alcoholic beverages,....)?

Second, look at what foreigners do with the dollars that Mr. Funk voluntarily gave to them in return for his clothing: foreigners either spend those dollars buying goods and services that Americans voluntarily produce and sell, or foreigners invest those dollars in America - in either case expanding the American market.

Trade is mutually beneficial. Mr. Funk's own actions, if not his words, help to prove it.