



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.

2 August 2012

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

Dear Editor:

Good for Kianna Scott that she found comfort by spending time in the wilderness before entering college (Letters, Aug. 2). But lest we forget that the kindness and inspiration that we moderns find in the wilderness are consequences of the riches, leisure, and security that we enjoy chiefly because of industrial capitalism, I offer here an observation from Thomas Babington Macaulay's "History of England":

"Indeed, law and police, trade and industry, have done far more than people of romantic dispositions will readily admit, to develop in our minds a sense of the wilder beauties of nature. A traveller must be freed from all apprehension of being murdered or starved before he can be charmed by the bold outlines and rich tints of the hills. He is not likely to be thrown into ecstasies by the abruptness of a precipice from which he is in imminent danger of falling two thousand feet perpendicular; by the boiling waves of a torrent which suddenly whirls away his baggage and forces him to run for his life; by the gloomy

grandeur of a pass where he finds a corpse which marauders have just stripped and mangled; or by the screams of those eagles whose next meal may probably be on his own eyes....

"It was not till roads had been cut out of the rocks, till bridges had been flung over the courses of the rivulets, till inns had succeeded to dens of robbers ... that strangers could be enchanted by the blue dimples of lakes and by the rainbows which overhung the waterfalls, and could derive a solemn pleasure even from the clouds and tempests which lowered on the mountain tops." [Thomas Babington

Macaulay, The History of England, Vol. 6 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1900), pp. 55-56]

31 July 2012

Editor, The Daily Beast

Dear Editor:

Nicholas Wapshott claims that a 1988 essay that Milton Friedman wrote on J.M. Keynes is a "key lost document" in which Friedman "concedes not only that Keynesianism can work but that big government is not evil so long as it is honestly administered" ("A Lovefest Between Milton Friedman and J.M. Keynes," July 30, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/07/30/nicholas-wapshott-a-lovefest-between-milton-friedman-and-j-m-keynes.html>). In his conclusion Mr. Wapshott repeats this suggestion - astonishing to anyone who has actually read Milton Friedman's works - that Friedman believed big government to be benign as long as it is in the right hands. Wapshott: "The lost essay ... calls into question whether those today who rail against the size of the state are blaming the system when they should be rooting out corrupt politicians and public officials instead."

Mr. Wapshott doesn't link to this article - a curiosity perhaps explained by the fact that in the article Friedman says almost exactly the opposite of what Mr. Wapshott claims him to say. After questioning the general applicability of Keynes's economic notions, Friedman commented on Keynes's politics: "I conclude that Keynes's political bequest has done far more harm than his economic bequest and this for two reasons. First, whatever the economic analysis, benevolent dictatorship is likely sooner or later to lead to a totalitarian society. Second, Keynes's economic theories appealed to a group far broader than economists primarily because of their link to his political approach." [Milton Friedman, "John Maynard Keynes," Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond Economic Quarterly, Spring 1997 (originally published 1988): http://www.richmondfed.org/publications/research/economic_quarterly/1997/spring/pdf/friedman.pdf?WT.si_n=Search&WT.si_x=3]

Does Friedman sound here like a man having a "lovefest" with Keynes?

Does he strike you as someone who shared Keynes's and Wapshott's naive confidence that the danger of big government can be avoided simply by efforts to "root out corrupt politicians and public officials"?

30 July 2012

Friends,

Here's my tribute in Newsday to Milton Friedman who, were he still alive, would celebrate his 100th birthday tomorrow:

<http://www.newsday.com/opinion/oped/boudreaux-milton-friedman-a-centennial-appreciation-1.3869874>