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On 'New Jersey's Helmet Law'

Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, brilliant laissez-faire economist of 18th-century France, said that interventions by the government to protect consumers "would be like wanting it to provide cushions for all the children who might fall." If he were alive today, wouldn't he be amused to learn that a sober (?) New Jersey legislature (Cultural Revolutions, March 1993), in mandating helmets for all children riding bicycles, finally took him literally instead of mistaking his words for simple ridicule?

—Morgan Reynolds
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On 'Walt Whitman and P. C.'

I was appalled to read of A.S. Ash's "humanizing" of Walt Whitman's poetry (Liberal Arts, March 1993) and perhaps even astounded that Ash left the poet's last name intact instead of changing it to "Whitperson." Who is this Ash, anyway? He/she/it has not "edited" but rather tampered with a work of art, in the name of political correctness. Whitman, regardless of how one feels about his poetry, wrote in his own unique voice—and that voice, like the voice of any poet, deserves to be heard the way it was originally presented, not just for artistic integrity but for historical accuracy.

A self-styled "humanist," Ash apparently has no grasp of what poetry entails or expresses. Poets choose their words not solely for meaning but for sound and rhythm as well. For Ash to replace any poet's words "where appropriate" (and here one must ask: appropriate to whom and by what criterion?) is plainly absurd. One can just imagine Ash as a music editor, reharmonizing the "incorrect" parallel fifths of a Beethoven composition, or maybe as a museum curator, recoloring various faces in Leonardo's "The Last Supper" for the sake of

achieving ethnic balance.

More idiotic still is Ash's introduction of "humanist personal pronouns" into Whitman's work "in cases where distinction of gender is ambiguous, irrelevant, or misleading." The pronouns *who*, *whose*, and *whom* (rendered "humanistically" by Ash as *hu*, *hus*, and *hum*) do not convey, and have never conveyed, any kind of gender distinction, so what is Ash's point in making these ridiculous substitutions? Ash has merely replaced the traditional spellings with phonetic spellings, and not very good ones at that.

Ash has the aesthetic sensibility of a mule and the linguistic scholarship of a hinny—animals that, fittingly enough, are almost always neuter. P.C. means political correctness, but in Ash's case these letters might also stand for philosophical cowardice and philological cretinism.

—Louis B. Delpino
Philadelphia, PA

On 'Ancestry and History'

As Czeslaw Milosz has written, "The true enemy of man is generalization." In his March 1993 column ("Capture the Flag, Part I") John Shelton Reed writes: "As Eugene Genovese, characteristically gallant, observed during an exchange on the subject at a recent meeting of the American Studies Association, no one should be required to spit on his ancestors' graves."

Well if not required to spit on their ancestors' graves then shouldn't they be encouraged to do so if their ancestors are people like Lenin, Stalin, and other communist monsters, or if their ancestors are Hitler or the Auschwitz camp commandant? I'm talking about the genocidists of the 20th century, the people about whom Ralph Raico was talking in the same March issue. Professor Genovese may be "characteristically gallant," but if Professor Reed quotes him correctly he's being—uncharacteristically—morally obtuse.

—Arnold Beichman
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SACRIFICE, a word not often heard in the nation's capital during the past dozen years, is being spoken by Washington politicians again. Since none of these gentlemen or ladies has been noticed even to observe Lent, much less to abstain from newly acquired powers, perquisites, and salaries, the rest of the country may be likened to 255 million turkeys nervously watching the Big House where smoke from ritual fires has already begun to ascend from the chimney and trying to recall, like the characters in the ethnic joke, whether Thanksgiving comes before Easter.

Malcolm Muggeridge (I think it was) once defined liberalism as Christianity without the Cross. This insight, though true, is incomplete, implying as it does that secular humanism is willing to deny the justification for suffering by the majority, excluding only the usual designated and preferred categories of victim groups. In fact, however, that is not the case: what is lacking in liberalism is not the Cross, it is the One who was placed on the Cross; not suffering itself but the identity of the Sufferer, the Priest as Victim, God made man in reparation for man's sins. Of course, liberals have historically denied that personal suffering has any value, while their determination to be as gods themselves has led them to resist the actuality of the Son of God. Yet as Pascal said, nothing is more obvious than the fallenness of man's nature—even to a liberal. And so liberalism, while rejecting the theological concept of sin, retains nevertheless a sense of human guilt requiring expiation—perhaps we should simply say punishment—through sacrifice. And having rejected out of hand the possibility of a Divine Victim, liberalism recognizes a single candidate worthy to serve for the oblation: We the People, of course.

This—the chosen suffering that ends in death, not life—is the meaning of what Muggeridge in a famous essay called “The Liberal Death Wish,” the explanation for the otherwise inexplicable and seemingly irrational impulse toward self-destruction of modern liberal societies, from their love affair with abortion to their commitment to immigration policies that are certain, if implemented for a sufficient period, to

wreck the so-called host countries and the long-standing political institutions that govern them. Conscious of sin, but lacking a theological explanation for it, liberalism is a construction of self-hating people seeking to destroy themselves and the societies to which they belong as rapidly and effectively as they can manage, which turns out to be very rapidly and very effectively indeed.

As I write, three months into the Clinton administration, the alleged need for national “sacrifice” has claimed: the “moderate” positions adopted by the Democratic candidate in the months preceding the election last November; his promise of a tax break for the American middle class, as well as a number of other solemn pledges and assurances; the economic recovery begun during the Bush administration, which the Clinton administration would like to reverse by tax increases and spending bills aimed at rescuing and preserving the dream of socialism in America; millions of unborn children whose lives are to be offered up to the progressive shibboleths of feminism and no-fault promiscuity; and 60-odd nuts and eccentrics, plus 17 children, whose lives were made forfeit by Janet Reno and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms to the majesty and prestige of the leviathan state. Not a bad record at all, when you consider that Easter was only ten days ago.

—Chilton Williamson, Jr.

JACK KEMP was the great champion of freedom, according to official conservatives, whereas Dick Darman was the “Prince of Darkness.” In fact, whatever was wrong with Darman (President Bush's budget director), Kemp was far worse.

The Kemp-Darman battle came down to this: Kemp, a leftist Republican, constantly sought to expand the budget for his “war on poverty,” and Darman, a moderate with twice Kemp's IQ, was sometimes able to stand in his way. For example, Kemp's HOPE (Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere) program for the semi-privatization of public housing was costing more than \$100,000 per unit. According to Jason DeParle's “Kemp Loses the War on

Poverty” in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, Darman pointed out that it would be cheaper to buy poor blacks their own condos, causing a temper tantrum from Kemp. But even Darman didn't point out—as Jeffrey A. Tucker did in *Chronicles*—that the units were not really sold to their tenants, since tenants could not in turn sell them on the open market. Worse, a new unit of public housing had to be built for each one “sold.” Darman did note that “enterprise zones” were simply excuses for more welfare spending, and that state-level zones hadn't worked. And Darman warned Kemp not to call them “opportunity zones” as he wanted to do, or people would be making fun of “the Land of Oz.”

At a meeting of cabinet undersecretaries, Kemp called it “unconscionable” that welfare recipients lose a dollar in benefits for each dollar earned. His answer: let them keep 85 cents in welfare for each new dollar earned. Darman, who had just stepped into the room, did some quick arithmetic in his head and pointed out that such a plan would allow people earning \$70,000 a year to collect welfare. There is a large “technical literature on welfare,” Darman noted. Kemp should read it. By this and other actions, Darman showed that he had a “really sick attitude,” said Kemp. Darman “didn't care about poverty; he cared about what the budget looked like.” There's “not a single inner city of the United States that even knows who Dick Darman is” (to his credit, some might say).

A nut as well as a leftist, Kemp “would flop in his cabinet seat like a beached whale, sink his head into his hands, roll his eyes, and scribble exasperated notes.” He would also lean back in his chair and stick a finger down his throat to show his opposition to an idea or person. Those who criticized him were “wee-weeing on me.” One of those wee-weeing was the President, who refused to let Kemp call his proposals a “War on Poverty.” Such a phrase conjured up visions of big government even for Bush.

Kemp had had trouble from the beginning. On his first day as HUD secretary, he took an inch-thick stack of spending proposals to White House