



## 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.**

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9 April 2006

Editors, New York Review of Books

To the Editors:

Reviewing Daniel Cohen's *Globalization and Its Enemies*, John Gray writes that Cohen "distinguishes two kinds of economic growth - the 'Smithian' variety that reflects Adam Smith's vision in *The Wealth of Nations*, in which growth is achieved by utilizing the benefits of the division of labor, and a 'Schumpeterian' variety that is driven by continuous technological innovation" ("The Global Delusion," April 27).

These are not "two kinds of economic growth"; one is intimately entwined with the other. And none other than Adam Smith explained that

technological innovation's most lively and reliable spark is an expanding division of labor. In Book I, Chapter I of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith wrote that "every body must be sensible how much labour is facilitated and abridged by the application of proper machinery. It is unnecessary to give any example. I shall only observe, therefore, that the invention of all those machines by which labour is so much facilitated and abridged, seems to have been originally owing to the division of labour. Men are much more likely to discover easier and readier methods of attaining any object, when the whole attention of their minds is directed towards that single object, than when it is dissipated among a great variety of things. But in consequence of the division of labour, the whole of every man's attention comes

naturally to be directed towards some one very simple object. It is naturally to be expected, therefore, that some one or other of those who are employed in each particular branch of labour should soon find out easier and readier methods of performing their own particular work, wherever the nature of it admits of such improvement."

8 April 2006

Program Director, All Things Considered  
635 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Editor:

In his commentary (April 7), Minuteman founder Jim Gilchrist commits several errors - each one so fundamental that it completely undermines the credibility of everything that

he says. I mention here only two of these errors.

First, Gilchrist repeatedly calls today's immigration an "invasion." It's inexcusable to equate unarmed people seeking jobs and a better life with armed marauders seeking to kill us and to steal our homes and factories. Second, he asserts that the "magnitude" of immigration today is "unprecedented." Not so. Annual immigration rates peaked a century ago at 1.5 percent of U.S. population; today's rate is about half that figure. And today's foreign-born population is ten percent, well below its peak of nearly 15 percent in 1910.

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7 April 2006

Editor, The Washington Post  
1150 15th St., NW  
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

Proposing that government create and enforce "tradable emission allowances" for high-calorie foods, John Sotos abuses language by describing obesity as "a pollution problem" ("A Modest - and Slimming! - Proposal," April 7). Pollution is a problem because those who generate it ignore the preferences of those who suffer it. No such "externality" causes weight gain. Those who produce

high-calorie foods do so in response to the preferences of those who consume these foods.

As for Dr. Sotos's claim that "we Americans cannot help but ingest the calories present in the environment all around us," I can say only that if our minds and spirits are so utterly feeble that we can't control our appetites, then I wonder how we can be trusted to choose the political leaders who will protect us from our irresponsible selves?

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6 April 2006

Editor, The Wall Street  
Journal  
200 Liberty Street  
New York, NY 10281

Dear Editor:

Writing about China's alleged policy of artificially devaluing the yuan, Lawrence Lindsey says that "[t]here are losers, of course, most notably American producers of goods that are now made in China" ("Yuan Compromise?" April 6). I disagree. This policy's most notable victims are Chinese citizens forced by their government to subsidize Americans' consumption.

That said, prudence requires that America remain steadfastly open to foreign goods and services regardless of whatever foolishness

happens abroad. Keeping Uncle Sam from battering his own citizens with protectionism is difficult enough; he can't be trusted with the additional task of rescuing foreign citizens from their own scurrilous governments.

4 April 2006

The Editor, The New Yorker

To the Editor:

John Cassidy bolsters the hypothesis that people's health is harmed by relative (rather than absolute) deprivation by citing evidence from the animal kingdom ("Relatively Deprived," April 3). For example, "dominant rhesus monkeys have lower rates of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) than monkeys further down the social hierarchy."

Contrary to Cassidy's suggestion, however, such findings do not support policies to redistribute income. After all, animals with social hierarchies have no monetary income. Because status among humans is determined not only by income but also by traits such as political power, athletic prowess, military heroics, intellectual success, and good looks, equalizing incomes will intensify the importance of these non-pecuniary traits as sources of status. And there's no reason why persons with low status in these non-pecuniary categories will not suffer all the stress and envy now allegedly suffered by people with low incomes.