

BOOKS, ARTICLES, AND ITEMS OF ACADEMIC INTEREST

Compiled, with Commentary, by Carol Iannone

Important Paper

“The Future of Family Law: Law and the Marriage Crisis in North America,” published by the Institute for American Values in 2005, and available online. A new school of thought is taking hold in family law, that marriage is no longer the pre-eminent social institution for bonding between the sexes and rearing children, but only one of many types of “close personal relationships” that adults can form. Naturally, the academy was instrumental in bringing this new theory to birth. The writers marvel at how quickly these developments took place: “A particular school of thought openly aimed at re-conceptualizing marriage first took root in the academy in the 1980s. By the late 1990s it had come to dominate fashionable academic theorizing on sexual intimacy” and is now transforming “family law from its historic role as the protector of marriage into something very close to its antagonist.” Remember those people who dismissed the importance of the radicalization of the academy because the ideas being promoted there were just foolish fads that would soon pass?

The Great Tradition in Literary Criticism

Good literary criticism continues to be produced about writers in the great tradition. Two recent examples are Thomas L. Jeffers, *Apprenticeships: The Bildungsroman from Goethe to Santayana* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), which treats those two writers and also Dickens, James, Forster, and Lawrence; and George A. Panichas, *Joseph Conrad: His Moral Vision* (Mercer University Press, 2005; www.mupress.org), which analyzes, among other works, *The Secret Agent*, *Lord Jim*, *Victory*, *Under Western Eyes*, and *Nostromo*.

Daphne Patai and Will H. Corral’s *Theory’s Empire: An Anthology of Dissent* (Columbia University Press 2005), usefully gathers pieces from a wide variety of critics defending traditional literary discourse and dissecting the fallacies of contemporary theory. James Seaton reviews the book in the *Wall Street Journal* (“Truth Has Nothing to Do with It,” 4 August 2005), offers choice examples from the theorists’ own writings, and wonders “how anyone could ever have taken such pronouncement seriously.” Yet many did, and do.

There Won’t Always Be an England?

Novelist and short-story writer Dan Jacobson sadly recognizes the costs of large-scale immigration in Britain. Himself an immigrant from South Africa, and

the offspring of an immigrant from Latvia, he regrets the replacement of the traditional British culture with the movement “toward greater rule-bound and bureaucratic accommodation of multiculturalism through human rights acts, sex discrimination legislation, admission quotas, race relations laws, and directives addressed by more and more specially appointed commissions to more and more areas of common life.” All this means the loss of other forms of social exchange, such as

shared, unspoken assumptions; oblique allusions and quasifamilial understandings; mutually recognized expectations and discreet insistent curiosities; obligations informally accepted and returned; rights to both intimacy and aloofness acknowledged; practices and forms of speech cunningly coded to include some and exclude others.

As a fiction writer, Jacobson knows how such implicit cultural understandings can make for great literature:

No wonder English literature made so much of these, while it could! Bonds and reciprocities of this kind were always subject to misuse and corruption of course. Nevertheless, they helped to mould and sustain a remarkably interesting and creative society. Their withering is a loss. An irreversible one, too.

(“If England Was What England Seems,” *TLS* 11 March 2005, a revised version of the tenth Alan Marre Maccabbeans Centenary Lecture given at University College London in November 2004.)

Greek to Them

“Unclear on American Campus: What the Foreign Teacher Said,” Alan Finder, *New York Times*, 24 June 2005. Thanks to substandard science and math education in the U.S., graduate students in those fields at American universities who serve as teaching assistants often come from such countries as China and have such poor English that students can’t understand them.

Teaching the Teachers

Improving the education of teachers is Sandra Stotsky’s aim in “It’s Academic: Teacher Training in Core Subjects Needs Firm Grounding in Liberal Arts,” *Common Wealth*, Summer 2005 (See Dr. Stotsky’s related article, “Ed Schools: The Real Shame of a Nation,” in this issue.) She discusses the need to wrest control of teaching licensure from schools of education in order to demand greater academic preparation in subject matter. Some reassessment of the vacuity of education schools is taking place in the general culture as well: Anemona Hartocollis, “Who Needs Education Schools?” *New York Times*, 31 July 2005.

Evolutionary Arrogance

In a signed editorial in the *New York Times* (“Grasping the Depth of Time as a First Step in Understanding Evolution,” 23 August 2005), Verlyn Klinkenborg registers a familiar accusation against proponents of intelligent design, that they wish “to preserve the myth of a separate divine creation for humans in the belief that only that can explain who we are.” And he superciliously instructs us that

there is a destructive hubris, a fearful arrogance, in that myth. It sets us apart from nature, except to dominate it. It misses both the grace and the moral depth of knowing that humans have only the same stake, the same right, in the Earth as every other creature that has ever lived here. There is a righteousness—a responsibility—in the deep, ancestral origins we share with all of life.

Oh, la di da and piffle poofle and what nonsense! Evolutionists also make a special case for man. Stephen M. Barr (“The Devil’s Chaplain Confounded,” *First Things*, August/September 2004) points out that arch-evolutionist Richard Dawkins claims we can rebel against the chilling moral implications of Darwinism. “What enables us to rebel,” Barr writes, explaining Dawkins, “is the fact that nature, though mindless, has accidentally endowed us with intelligence. Our brain can understand the evolutionary process that gave rise to it, and thus can transcend it.” How convenient. Barr argues that many evolutionists are actually unable to confront the implications of their own theory.

Affirmative Action

In their battle to put the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative on the ballot, Ward Connerly and his stalwart band continue to fight against the thugs of the group known as By Any Means Necessary, but recently ran into some thugs holding state office. Although the initiative received more than enough signatures to be put on the ballot for the fall election, the Michigan Board of Canvassers refused to certify it, claiming that the signers did not understand what they were signing! Aside from its being preposterous, such a judgment is totally outside of the powers of the board to make. Jennifer Gratz, victorious plaintiff of *Gratz v. Bollinger*, relates:

Right before the meeting of the Board of Canvassers began, one board member approached me and exclaimed that she found the MCRI shirts, which read “End Race Preferences,” to be “anti-American.” To which I respond: Denying people the right to vote, infringing on their right to freedom of speech and privacy of thought, and disregarding the rule of law and your oath as an elected official to uphold the Michigan constitution are the truly anti-American activities. They are as anti-American, in fact, as giving preferences to some groups while discriminating against others.

Brava, Jennifer! (“End Race Preferences,” *NRO*, 18 August 2005). In October 2005, the Michigan Court of Appeals ordered the canvassers to certify the MCRI, but their next meeting, in December, “was repeatedly disrupted by about 250 rowdy Detroit high school students and the group By Any Means Necessary,” according to Kathleen Gray writing in the *Detroit Free Press* (15 December 2005). At one point, “about 50 students advanced toward the board, knocking over a table before being stopped by Lansing police. Others jumped on chairs and stomped their feet.” The board again failed to certify the MCRI that day in what Chris Thomas, director of elections for the Michigan Secretary of State, called “a victory of mob rule.” The board did finally certify the initiative in January 2006. MCRI opponents continue to protest various aspects of the process.

See also the March and May 2005 issues of Ward’s newsletter *The Egalitarian*, which features *AQ* contributor Lawrence Auster’s superb two-part analysis of the deceitfulness and doublethink of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, written by Sandra Day O’Connor (“*Grutter*—A Revolutionary Decision that Must Not Stand,” available from the American Civil Rights Institute website, www.acri.org).

The California Association of Scholars announces their
major one-day conference

**The Politically and Culturally One-Sided University:
Causes, Consequences, and Remedies**

22 April 2006

**The Annenberg School,
University of Southern California
Davidson Conference Center
3415 South Figueroa Street
Los Angeles, CA 90089**

Co-Sponsors: National Association of Scholars (NAS), Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI), American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), Pacific Legal Foundation (PLF), Pacific Research Institute (PRI), Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE).

Keynote by Alan Charles Kors, University of Pennsylvania & FIRE, followed by panels diagnosing the political and cultural imbalance in higher education, analyzing its causes and consequences for the academic enterprise, and looking at remedies already underway or planned.

The registration fee is \$25. For updated information, please go to www.calscholars.org or info@calscholars.org