

Daily Nebraskan Editorial Board University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Representation needed

Parking committee lacks student members

SUN President Bryan Hill sent a letter last semester to Chancellor Martin Massengale and to Vice Chancellors James Griesen and John Goebel asking for representation on the Parking Advisory Committee that would more fairly reflect student concerns.

Hill pointed out that students account for 70 percent of the total parking revenue but currently represent only 40 percent of the committee. Student concerns easily can be overlooked by university employees who make up the greater percentage on the committee.

Hill's suggestion was to increase student membership to about 53 percent of the committee.

Massengale's response to Hill was brief and to the point: a kind, gentle no.

Once again, administration has promised to seriously look at the parking problem at UNL, but, unfortunately, when it comes to actually implementing solutions by allowing students to have a bigger voice on an important committee, administrators come up with excuses.

Massengale's excuse (in a letter to Hill) for not placing more students on the committee was that bylaws already exist for the committee to change its membership. He added that, "I am very reluctant to make a change in the Parking Advisory Committee other than those suggested through the bylaws of the committee."

Fine. But Massengale should keep an eye on the Parking Advisory Committee. If a change isn't made, he should take up Hill's proposal himself.

A change in the committee would give students greater representation, which conceivably could swing parking decisions in their favor.

As Hill said, "Administration now has an obligation to solve parking problems."

And part of that obligation is allowing students to be represented fairly in the process.

Emily Rosenbaum for the Daily Nebraskan

Analyze issues, then decide

Sometimes the wrong thing gets into the wrong place -- like C.J. Sheper's column being in the Daily Nebraskan Friday, Jan. 26.

One hopes that an editorial column written by a news-editorial major would include some degree of reasoning behind the argument, but I guess in this case that's asking too much. Bad luck? Who knows.

Your argument that, if he (John Joubert) had known he was going to be electrocuted for his crime, he wouldn't have murdered those "sweet, wonderful boys" (If they had been "spiteful, juvenile delinquents, would Joubert deserve a lighter sentence?) is ridiculous, to put it mildly.

For one thing, people don't sit around debating whether they are going out to kill and mutilate children depending on whether or not they'll get fried. Deciding whether or not you'll risk getting fined for sneaking alcohol into a public park, yes, but people who can even hold the thought of such a hideous crime aren't making rational choices -- murder isn't a rational choice. It's a moral choice, which is something you fail to grasp -- what the hell does I.Q. have to do with anything? A person with an I.Q. of 85 knows that killing children is wrong. Do you really think there are people walking around right now who are thinking of random and senseless murder, kept in check only by the knowledge that they could get the chair?

You are talking about an important moral issue here. Does society decide, in this instance, that murder by the state is justified? What message are we sending to the world and to ourselves if we condone capital punishment? And, more relevant to your column, would it do any good? This is the issue you fail to fully address -- as far as I can see, you were revolted by the picture (a normal response, to be sure), and since this

crime was indeed sick, you feel he should die for it. Fine, but as you admit, your "logic is mixed," perhaps the only piece of true insight your column gives us.

Because your logic is mixed, faulty and unable to deal with any reality other than your own reaction to the crime and its consequences, do you think the decision between the chair or a life sentence should be decided on the basis of how grossed-out the judge got?

Consider also a man walking into his bedroom to find his wife in bed with his best friend -- in a jealous rage he grabs his shotgun and shoots them both. Would he at any point during this episode (which probably lasted all of 10 seconds, as most heat-of-the-moment situations do) sit down and rationally consider his options and the consequences of his actions? If your answer is yes, as it was for a psychopath like Joubert, then I think you need to spend a little more time studying how real people in the real world think, feel and act. You just might learn something.

Ultimately, your shortcoming is that you fail to see that in the scenario I presented (and there are hundreds of instances like that in our country each year) murder happens when someone is pushed, either by overwhelming passions and emotions or by permanent mental instability, to a point where reason doesn't fit into the picture, where rational choices can't be made -- the fact that somebody is capable of committing murder should tell you that calm reasoning has been left behind. I hope that after some thought, this bare truth might make some sense to you.

And please, next time you're driving down the interstate in hysterics, pull over until you get control of yourself. You could kill someone.

Kirk Johnson social services (between semesters)



Can the right survive today?

Columnist ponders effect of communism's death on conservatism

The anticommunist left effectively disappeared with the death of Henry "Scoop" Jackson and the open declaration of "neo-conservatism" -- a term ratifying the rightward lurch of a generation of former leftists (mainly former Trotskyites). The American right, however, never opted out of the Cold War: Anticommunism was the one constant, unifying, highly diverse tradition in the conservatism of the post-WWII era.

In often uneasy alliance, anticommunism permitted disagreements to be glossed over for the duration of the war. And the movement is diverse, encompassing libertarians, "classical" liberals, traditionalists, natural-rights advocates and religionists.

Of course, to be given the desire of one's heart is not an unmitigated blessing: Conservatives who have lived with the Cold War for their entire lives now can be seen walking about muttering to themselves and blinking at a new world they do not understand.

Liberal pundits can scarcely contain their glee, and conservatives speak softly for fear of unhappy prescience, as they pose the question, "Is the death of conservatism in the death of communism?"

The obvious answer is that the movement will not survive intact: Someone will have to leave -- the libertarians and the Burkeans will make sure of that. But whether or not the movement survives as a relevant voice in American politics depends on who else has to leave and why.

Some hints of the nature and significance of the division were given at a conference last week in Claremont, Calif., organized by the Claremont Institute, a conservative think-tank.

The conference, born of the mind of William Rusher, publisher of National Review for more than 30 years, was devoted to the "Ambiguous Legacy of the Enlightenment," an admittedly odd topic from which to glean the structure of post-Cold War conservatism. Nonetheless, the clues were pretty obvious.

The issue seething underneath this apparently arcane subject revolves around the depth of Enlightenment thought in the American founding: Does the founding's reliance upon the "shallow Enlightenments" of the English and the Scots doom the project, ultimately, to the paroxysmic nihilism of the French Enlightenment?

A recent flurry of articles in National Review by several conference participants has reopened old battles and old issues. The division is deep and fundamental.

On one side are conservatives like the late Leo Strauss and his Claremont progeny, particularly Harry Jaffa and Charles Kesler. They argue that the genius of the West -- and of the United States' founding -- springs

from the dynamic tension issuing from its double commitment to reason (so-called) and revelation. But not just any understanding of revelation: Faith must be of an approved kind; a faith that serves the American regime.

Indeed, Tom West of the University of Dallas even argued that the American founding required a specific theology wherein people approach God as "almost equal." He approved of this and disapproved of the Augustinian and Calvinistic traditions which, in West's terms, has believers "cringing" before God.

And in so arguing, West approved of the idolatrous impulse in the American founding. After all, I pointed out, the Original Sin was Eve's desire to approach God on West's same terms.

Ernest van den Haag of Fordham University and Gerhart Niemeyer of the University of Notre Dame suggest that such a theology of "self-salvationism" dooms Enlightenment "rationality" into the patent irrationalism of Rorty. The key figure in the decline of Enlightenment thinking into irrationalism isn't Hobbes, as West believed, but Pelagius -- the fifth century heretic asserting the autonomy of the human soul.

The very possibility of belief in the face of the irrationalism of Rorty is the question of moment -- the dictates of natural reasoning are simply irrelevant and impotent, if not positively wrongheaded. The time for synthesis has passed.

The key to answering the question, "will the right survive the death of communism," is found in last week's missing participant: the Christian right.

The survival of conservatism depends not simply on retaining the mass numbers in the Christian right, nor upon a cynical exploitation of the movement, but upon a full-bodied, confident assertion of Christianity's public philosophy.

That Claremont conservatives seem unable to understand the claims of the Christian right only bodes ill for the conservative movement should Claremont conservatives inherit the reigns of conservatism without a modification of their own public understanding of Christianity.

The time has passed for a syncretic fudge on fundamental issues.

Jim Rogers

from the dynamic tension issuing from its double commitment to reason (so-called) and revelation.

In his eloquent paper, Kesler argued that the American founding reasserted the grand synthesis of reason and revelation found in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The synthesis of Athens and Jerusalem is neither an absurdity nor an impossibility: Reason (so-called) and revelation are not contradictory, but consistent and mutually supporting. Thus, Kesler praises the shallow Enlightenments, and points out that they did not share the anti-religious bigotry of the French Enlightenment. In reasserting Thomistic wisdom, then, the proper arena for state action is only where reason (so-called) and revelation coincide.

In stark contrast to Kesler's claim was Oxford University professor John Gray's argument that only faith, or wholly theological reasoning, can avoid the collapse of Enlightenment reasoning, shallow or not, into an abject nihilism. He repeats the medieval "I believe that I may understand."

Weighing into the dispute was Richard John Neuhaus (author of "The Naked Public Square") with his analysis of the logical end of the Enlightenment project in the writings of "liberal ironist" Richard Rorty. The project collapsed in the "disintegration of confidence that there are such standards by which all rational beings are bound..."

Neuhaus, as I take him, points out the ultimate poverty of natural, i.e., non-fiducial, reasoning.

In contrast, the Claremont conser-

Rogers is on leave from Brown University in Providence, R.I. and a former editorial page editor and columnist for the Daily Nebraskan.