

## SCRAMBLED EPISTEMOLOGY

In effect, *Last Embrace* is a series of set pieces and scenes that, while they contain the same characters talking about the same things, are not connected to one another, neither in story line nor in sequence of events. I do not think this is the failing of the film editor; he could have spliced together what he left on the cutting-room floor and created the same nonstory. This movie is *not* a fantastic accident; what strikes one about it is its meticulousness of production. Nor do I think that its producers are engaging in a deliberate effort to scramble the epistemology of movie-going audiences. Nor do I believe that they are indulging in a personal attack on metaphysics, that is, attempting to undercut basic cause-effect premises. Professors of philosophy are more able and more likely to do that than anything produced in Hollywood.

No, my thrust here is that *Last Embrace*, regarded by critics and audiences alike as a *gem* of a thriller, as something that can stand on equal footing with the gems of the past, is the best that can be done by people who have been taught that reality is what you want it to be and that logic and reason are arbitrary contrivances of the mind that can be discarded from any field of human endeavor without consequence.

The minds that produced *Last Embrace* (or any other modern movie, for that matter) may or may not consciously subscribe to these anti-mind tenets; I doubt if they do subscribe to any philosophical notion or idea. Film producers have been notoriously nonintellectual and not very fastidious in what they regard as interesting or worthwhile subject material. They have the reputation of being witless practitioners of what *others* claim to be the norm, the important, the significant. Hollywood is not an originator, not a primary source; it merely supplies the mirrors and the masks for the Fun Park Laugh Palace that is the exclusive property of today's intellectuals, whose concept it is; who own it, operate it, and advertise it. If there is to be a return to romanticism in film, Hollywood must first switch accounts and retool its assembly lines.

It is apparent that the director of *Last Embrace*, Jonathan Demme, is a "fan" of Alfred Hitchcock. In fact, all the reviews and promotional blurbs insist on this. There are clear "echoes" of Hitchcock throughout the film. An assassination attempt takes place in a belltower (*Vertigo*). Janet Margolin contemplates using a pair of scissors on Roy Scheider as he seduces her (*Dial M for Murder*). Train rides are prodigious (you name it). A sea of yellow rain slicks confuses Scheider at Niagara Falls (*Foreign Correspondent*). Scheider surprises Margolin in the shower (*Psycho*). Margolin tries to comfort Scheider during

one of his mental relapses (*Spellbound*). Scheider leans dangerously over a railing in an effort to pull back Margolin and save her from plunging into the Falls (*North by Northwest*). Did I miss anything?

If one respects or reveres a master, one at least tries to be original in one's own work and refuses to revert to the shoddy practice of using a master's materials or ideas to salvage what one should not have produced in the first place. So who ever put the idea in everybody's heads that Demme is an *admirer* of Hitchcock?

It may be conceded that there are similarities of event in *Last Embrace* and, for example, *North by Northwest*, but any similarity in content, story, or characterization in the two films is pure, wishfully desperate thinking. There is, to say the least, a philosophical gap between the two

that serves to illustrate how much our culture has disintegrated in 20 years.

In the climax of *NN*, Thornhill pulls Eve Kendall to safety. In *Last Embrace* (in their last embrace, Margolin kneels Scheider in the groin, because she loves him), Harry Hannon, in similar circumstances, fails to save her from certain death. It might have been more novel had he saved her so they could live happily ever after. Or it might have been more interesting if they had both gone over the Falls. But no matter what ending was tacked onto this piece of misery, the only thing we can be certain of is death, which is the price one pays for incoherency, in the name of art or anything else.

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## books

### Across-the-Board Tax Cuts—But Not Freedom

**An American Renaissance: A Strategy for the 1980s.**

By Jack Kemp.

New York: Harper & Row. 1979. 207 pp. \$8.95.

Reviewed by Doug Bandow

Republican congressman Jack Kemp of New York, a potential presidential aspirant, has written his guide for a new populist conservatism. In issuing his clarion call, Kemp remains committed to the Republican Party and is currently involved in former California governor Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign.

The primary focus of *An American Renaissance* is on taxes and their effect on economic growth. Kemp, called a "one-note candidate" by *Washington Star* columnist Jack Germond, justifies this preoccupation by noting that:

*It has become fashionable to dismiss any significant attempt to change things as "single-issue politics."... Yet when I travel around the country, I find that a single issue concerns Americans above all else: The dominant issue of our time is the anemic and unhealthy state of the U.S. economy. Tax relief is not so much an end in itself as a means of getting this economy moving again. Economic growth must come first—not because it is inherently more important than other personal and social goals, but because without growth, progress toward one goal can only be*

*achieved by impoverishing something or someone else.*

Kemp argues that high tax rates are now stifling economic growth by restricting the "entrepreneurial talent, the managerial talent, [and] the creative talent of men and women." He persuasively contends that such high tax barriers affect both capital and labor investment, creating what University of Southern California economist Arthur Laffer calls "the wedge"—the unnecessary difference between an individual's effort and the reward for that effort.

Kemp's solution is straightforward—getting the government "out of the way" by reducing tax rates by 30 percent across-the-board over a three-year period. Indeed, Kemp contends, though admittedly cannot prove, that the increase in economic growth would be so great that tax revenues would also increase. He argues, relying upon the so-called Laffer curve, which charts the relationship between tax rates and tax revenues, that taxes have reached the point of diminishing returns. He also cites the Kennedy tax rate cut of the early 1960s, which increased government revenue by some \$54 billion over a six-year period.

Though increasing government revenue is not a libertarian objective, decreasing the proportion of private earnings going to government is. Indeed, the 30 percent cut barely would counterbalance already scheduled Social Security tax increases and the income tax inflation "bracket creep."

Unfortunately, Kemp's discussion of taxes is devoid of any recognition of the fundamental wrongness of taxation. While correctly recognizing that special-interest coalitions are uniting to tax and spend, his objection is that this practice "tears at our social fabric," not that it is wrong. And in 1979, he told the International Longshoremen's Association that "I am not interested in leading a tax re-

volt against government... What I am interested in is finding a way to pay for government."

Kemp's discussion of inflation is quite good. He recognizes that only the government—and not too many people working, producing, or consuming—causes inflation. His solutions to inflation center around passage of the Kemp-Roth tax rate cut, to increase economic growth and the production of goods and services; and reinstitution of the Gold Standard, to enforce monetary discipline. Though he does not also seek to slash government spending, he offers the genesis of a realistic anti-inflation program.

But Kemp is perhaps at his best discussing energy. He bluntly declares:

*There is no energy crisis, no imminent exhaustion of oil and gas even within this country, much less throughout the entire world. The whole notion is a grand deception, a massive fraud. What we have is not a sudden disappearance of natural resources, but a monumental calamity of government regulation.*

He explores the vastness of our energy resources, the clumsy attempts of the Carter administration to hide them, and the catastrophic effect of government regulation. Accurately characterizing the Carter administration as waging the "moral equivalent of war" on the American people, Kemp blasts the succession of tax proposals, ill-conceived attacks on "gas-guzzling" big cars, and big business synthetic fuels subsidies.

Even so, Kemp comes back again to admitting that reducing the size of government is not a priority. Indeed, in *An American Renaissance*, Kemp chastises the Republican Party for its theoretical, though ineffective, concern with government spending. Instead, he supports a generous "safety net of social services" that includes social security, catastrophic health insurance, and income redistribution.

Here, as with taxes, there is a depressing absence of any recognition of the rights of the individual. Kemp specifically chides libertarians for opposing income redistribution, since "the people, as a people, rightly insist that the whole look after the weakest of its parts." Indeed, he likens the American people to an "extended family," which justifies a generous government safety net of social services.

This argument ignores the fundamental difference between voluntary familial and charitable assistance, and coerced government assistance. Kemp never explores whether any moral principles justify forcing one person to support another—for however worthy a purpose. It is this failure, more than anything else, that marks the difference between a well-written political tract and a philosophical bible for a new political movement.

Finally, Kemp's discussion of defense matters begins by describing the military and diplomatic threats posed by the Soviet Union. He ignores the many weaknesses that beset the Soviet Union: the unreliability of the Warsaw Pact countries, the emergence of mainland China as an anti-Soviet power, the increase in religious and nationalistic fervor among the Soviet Union's minorities, and extensive structural weaknesses in the Soviet economy. Moreover, despite the Soviet numerical advantage, more than half of its forces are engaged in work that does not threaten the United States—construction, internal security, defense from China; its equipment is generally technologically inferior; and its forces operate under an inflexible and outmoded command structure. Finally, many of the Soviet Union's recent geopolitical gains, such as Angola and Afghanistan, are dubious at best.

Kemp's solutions are simple enough. For example, we should increase defense spending (despite the waste and the fact that up to two-thirds of our military spending supports foreign intervention); strengthen our alliances (even though we already have military relations with over 100 nations and have financed both sides of more than a dozen wars); support pro-Western forces (despite the past cost in lives and money, and the counterproductive effect in countries such as Iran); and, of course, strengthen our intelligence

community (in spite of its past assaults on our civil liberties).

*An American Renaissance* is flawed by its failure to recognize or explore individual rights, whether in reference to taxes, government spending, or (unmentioned) victimless crime. Moreover, Kemp's unswerving support for increased government spending and power for defense illustrates the fundamental ambivalence of most conservatives to across-the-board personal freedom.

But despite the book's flaws, Kemp, a consistent defender of free enterprise who very recently voted against both the Chrysler bailout and the windfall profits tax, offers a fine utilitarian argument for tax cuts in a nonlibertarian world, as well as an enlightening discussion of energy and inflation. His arguments for individual responsibility, against government paternalism, and in support of a national initiative are also worth reading.

On a landscape of statist, who believe that only increased taxes, expanded government programs, and more government spending can solve our problems, Kemp offers a vision, though at times myopic, of hope for the future. It is incumbent upon libertarians to utilize the potential of such nonlibertarians to advance the cause of liberty, while clearly distinguishing libertarianism from conservatism, whether populist or traditional.

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## Living Longer

### The Life Extension Revolution.

By Saul Kent.

New York: William Morrow & Sons.

1980. 465 pp. \$12.95.

Reviewed by Durk Pearson

Saul Kent's book is thoroughly researched and well written, an excellent overview of the field of life extension. It is worth buying for the 750-reference bibliography alone! This book is not for everyone, however. In the introduction, Kent states the three purposes of this book: (1) to provide an objective, comprehensive picture of where we stand today in our efforts to extend human lifespan, (2) to assist the reader in living a better and healthier life, and (3) to provide an effective starting point for action. How well did he meet these objectives?

Of course, in a field as rapidly changing and complex as life extension, no one person knows more than a fraction of the extant knowledge. This book, therefore, is not comprehensive. A great deal of useful theory and data is left out. It is absurd, however, to expect *any* 20th-century technical book to be all-encompassing. A wide

*The*  
**LIFE**  
**EXTENSION**

The definitive guide to  
better health, longer life,  
and physical immortality

**SAUL KENT**

range of subjects have been well chosen for inclusion—from regeneration to cryonics, from evaluating rejuvenation therapies to transplants and artificial organs. It may seem like a book about futurology, but this isn't the future. This is now.

One serious deficiency is the lack of a glossary, even though many technical words—for example, "genome" and