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HANG TOGETHER

"We must indeed all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately." – Benjamin Franklin

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THERE IS NO DIGNITY IN COMPULSION

Posted on August 11, 2013 by Daniel Kelly



Greg has graciously renewed our debate about whether the Good Samaritan was a government agent sent to care for the injured man in the ditch with funds he took from others. No, wait, that wasn't exactly our debate. But it's a good way of summarizing it.

Greg directs our attention to some good work the AEI is doing in developing proposals that eliminate barriers to competitive health insurance options. This is real health reform that would actually make affordable health care available to more people (unlike a certain current government program that is in a slow-motion meltdown).

I'm all about programs that reduce the need for wealth transfer programs (otherwise known as involuntary servitude), so this is an encouraging proposal. We're not likely to regain our freedom all in one fell swoop, so I'm happy to see incremental progress.

But let's make no mistake about it – the AEI proposal still relies, to some extent, on involuntary servitude. It still reserves a place for the government to compel one group of people to work for the benefit of another group without compensation. We call it a "safety net," and whether it is Spartan or plush and comfortable, it's still a program of involuntary servitude.

We tell ourselves that the involuntary servitude aspect of such “compassionate” programs is a moral good, that it reflects our better angels, and that we are conferring “dignity” on the program recipients. But this just isn’t true.

Transfer programs do *not* confer dignity on the recipient. They steal it. They teach the recipient he has the right to take from others what he has not earned and reduces him to a barely human state of dependency on government. I’ve written before about the effect that these “dignifying” programs have on the recipients:

Welfare recipients have a “right” to their benefits. If they meet statutory standards, benefits follow automatically. Recipients can even sue for them if improperly denied. No surprise, then, that a large segment of welfare recipients expect to be supported by the government as a matter of right. And if they are entitled to support, it follows that it ought to be enough to satisfy their needs. However much they receive, though, it’s never enough because the “rich” always have so much more and, doggone it, the disparity between me and thee just shouldn’t be that great. This is how we breed envy: Teach people they have a right to what belongs to others. So the beneficiaries descend to reliance on the state, and envy of their fellow man.

That’s not dignity. And no wealth transfer program will ever create it because dignity cannot be conferred by force. Dignity is, at least in part, the consequence of learning that you are the object of a love so real that someone will sacrifice for you. It has nothing to do with one person forcing another to give you something you’ve neither created nor earned.

Another problem with such programs is that it diminishes the dignity of those who are forced to fund them. As far as dignity is concerned, wealth transfer

programs represent, at best, a zero-sum equation. We are able to fool ourselves into thinking these programs increase the net amount of human dignity only because we don't look at the other side of the equation.

When we look at the funding side of these programs, we see that they demean the providers. It does so by reducing them, for part of the year, to involuntary servitude. Forcing someone to be an involuntary servant steals that person's dignity, as well as the value he has created. And it causes additional harm as well:

People work hard for their income, and the vast majority must carefully budget their resources, scrimp for the essentials, do without some things so they can afford others with a higher priority. Notwithstanding Americans' legendary generosity, they do not appreciate being compelled to give up their hard-won income to someone else. Especially when that someone is telling them that they have too much as it is, and that they must be made to pay their "fair share," or that we should "spread their wealth around." This is how we breed resentment: Take from those who create and give it to people who don't. Consequently, the providers resent both the state and their fellow man.

Nothing comes from nothing. Welfare recipients do not receive their checks as manna from heaven. Someone created that wealth, and then the government forcibly took it. This creates all manner of problems between the providers, the recipients, and the state (as I have said before).

So if we are to accept programs that include an involuntary servitude component, we should be honest about all the costs, including human dignity, to those who are forced to fund them.

1 Thought

THE PERPLEXED RIDDLER

Posted on May 5, 2013 by Daniel Kelly



*I don't know what it's
going to take to trap that
dratted Batman . . .*

So in our discussion about limits on governmental authority, here is Greg missing the point about my response to his support for wealth transfer programs as an essential component of any legitimate government structure. The nub of our argument is whether we (acting in our capacity as the government) have the authority to maintain a system of involuntary servitude