

Hang Together

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

Where We Are Going And Who Is Joining Us

Posted on **September 11, 2012** by **Daniel Kelly**

So . . . Renewed moral consensus for a united America. It's a grand project (both in terms of scope and importance). Along with the others in this blog, I'm guardedly optimistic we can get there. But where, exactly, is "there"?

Each of my fellow Hang Togetherites (Hangers Together?) has contributed some methodological parameters to what we are doing here, so I think it's only fair I offer something along those lines as well (future posts will get to the fun stuff). My contribution will focus on clearing a little ground and doing some map-work. You will, perhaps, indulge my travel-oriented vocabulary (you will, won't you?). I often see projects that develop over time as a type of road-trip. And I usually see myself driving a Ferrari Italia. It's red. Always.

Greg and Connor say we will seek, build and discover moral consensus. These are some solid rules of the road, and I believe they will serve us well. But if we are to arrive at our destination, we need to know at least three more things: (1) Who we should expect to get in the car with us, (2) our point of departure, and (3) how we will know when we have arrived at our destination. These are best understood, I think, as collaborative questions for the contributors to this blog and our readers.

Let's start with who ought to be in the car (figuratively, of course – I suspect we'll need a whole lot of people, and only one of them could fit in the Italia with me). If we are talking about an agreement sufficiently widespread to unite the whole nation, it seems obvious we need at least a majority of our population. It would be hard to conclude we have a consensus with anything less. In fact, a simple majority would probably not suffice. We are aiming for a consensus so broad that the truths on which we agree will become as unremarkable as the fact that chocolate tastes good.

But James Davison Hunter says that, while agreement amongst a majority (or even a super-majority) might satisfy the strict definition of consensus, it will be bare and ineffectual. One must also have, he says, buy-in from culturally-elite institutions (academia, government, the arts, etc.). Without that, any consensus is likely to be either short-lived or incapable of moving the cultural needle (or both).

On the other hand, is it enough for the culturally-elite institutions to agree with us if the majority of Americans are in dissent? One of our endearing national characteristics is a persistent contrarian streak. If we are told what to value, think, or pursue, we are apt to resist it just because we won't be told what to do. So I think we need both widespread agreement, as well as institutional cultural support. Which means we need multiple ways of seeking, building and discovering.

Next, let's talk about our starting place. We should take a census of issues to determine where consensus is likely to already exist. It makes a difference if we are starting in Berkeley as opposed to Branson. I have to confess that I'm much more attuned to the areas where we lack agreement (a hazard, I suppose, that comes of litigating for so many years). So I will especially appreciate your input on this aspect of our project.

And finally, what does our destination look like? Which are the issues on which we need moral consensus? *Really* need it, that is – without which we cannot hope for a united America. Between Karen (below), and Charles Murray (in his recent book *Coming Apart*), we can discern four that may fit this category:

- The nature and importance of the family;
- The purpose and significance of one's vocation
- The existence, nature, and role of the church; and
- The constitutive elements of community and their place in developing and transmitting culture.

These are not, of course, exhaustive or definitive answers. And if you peek under the surface of each one you will see they each teem with embedded issues. These are a start, and I propose them only as grist for the conversational mill. I will look forward to your thoughts. If I ever get that Italia, then everyone who offers a reply gets to go for a spin. In the passenger seat, of course.



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5 THOUGHTS ON "WHERE WE ARE GOING AND WHO IS JOINING US"

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Joe Kelly

on **September 13, 2012 at 1:32 pm** said:

Okay, how about at least one spin where I'm the driver, and you are navigator?



Daniel Kelly

on **September 13, 2012 at 3:32 pm** said:

That, my dear brother, depends entirely on the quality of your contribution!



Michael Hintze

on **September 13, 2012 at 11:15 pm** said:

The list you propose for building consensus appears to me strictly culturally oriented, and that is certainly an essential part of the overall consensus needed to arrive at a truly functional and healthy society. However, a fuller consensus requires that we be able to reach agreement on the nature and purpose of the government under which agree to live.

I submit that we need to reach agreement on the following (and in my opinion essential) nature and purposes of government:

1. Government is instituted among us for the following purposes:
 - a. To provide for the common defense against foreign enemies.
 - b. To arrest, convict, and punish those within our society who commit acts of aggression against others.
 - c. To enforce contracts into which the parties thereto have freely entered.

d. To provide a common medium of exchange (some may debate whether this is a necessary function of government).

2. Beyond the functions of government detailed above, government should stay out of the daily lives of the members of our society; neither inhibiting nor aiding anyone in that person's pursuit of happiness (person here should be understood in both its natural and corporate manifestations).

3. Each person's freedom to act extends only so far as the act does no harm to any other person (note that I would exclude from this any speech act to which it might be objected that the act "hurt my feelings"—I am tempted to say "in a trivial way," but that leaves open to interpretation the meaning of "trivial").

There are additional items to add to this list, but I will stop here so as not to overstay my welcome. 😊

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