



Compassion Versus Reality

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Dr. Thomas Sowell, a distinguished economist and longtime friend and colleague, recently wrote a series of columns under the title "A War of Words." He pointed out that liberals succeed in duping the public because they are so clever with words that they give the appearance of compassion. Liberals talk about the need for "affordable" housing and health care. They tarnish their enemies with terms such as "price-gouging" and "corporate greed." Uninformed and unthinking Americans fall easy prey to this demagoguery.

Politicians exploit public demands that government ought to do something about this or that problem by taking measures giving them greater control over our lives. For the most part, whatever politicians do, whether it's rent controls to produce "affordable" housing, or price controls to eliminate "price-gouging," the result is a calamity worse than

the original problem. For example, two of the most costly housing markets are the rent-controlled cities of San Francisco and New York. If you're over 40, you'll remember the chaos produced by the gasoline price controls of the 1970s. Socialist agendas have considerable appeal, but they produce disaster, and the more socialist they are, the greater the disaster.

Liberals often denounce free markets as immoral. The reality is exactly the opposite. Free markets, characterized by peaceable, voluntary exchange, with respect for property rights and the rule of law, are more moral than any other system of resource allocation. Let's examine just one reason for the superior morality of free markets.

Say that I mow your lawn and you pay me \$30, which we might think of as certificates of performance. Having mowed your lawn, I visit

my grocer and demand that my fellow men serve me by giving me 3 pounds of steak and a six-pack of beer. In effect, the grocer asks, "Williams, you're demanding that your fellow man, as ranchers and brewers, serve you; what did you do to serve your fellow man?" I say, "I mowed his lawn." The grocer says, "Prove it!" That's when I hand over my certificates of performance – the \$30.

Look at the morality of a resource allocation method that requires that I serve my fellow man in order to have a claim on what he produces and contrast it with government resource allocation.

The government can say, "Williams, you don't have to serve your fellow man; through our tax code, we'll take what he produces and give it to you." Of course, if I were to privately take what my fellow man produced, we'd call it theft. The only difference is when the government does it, that theft is legal but nonetheless theft – the taking of one person's rightful property to give to another.

Liberals love to talk about this or

that human right, such as a right to health care, food or housing. That's a perverse usage of the term "right." A right, such as a right to free speech, imposes no obligation on another, except that of non-interference. The so-called right to health care, food or housing, whether a person can afford it or not, is something entirely different; it does impose an obligation on another. If one person has a right to something he didn't produce, simultaneously and of necessity it means that some other person does not have right to something he did produce. That's because, since there's no Santa Claus or Tooth Fairy, in order for government to give one American a dollar, it must, through intimidation, threats and coercion, confiscate that dollar from some other American. I'd like to hear the moral argument for taking what belongs to one person to give to another person.

There are people in need of help. Charity is one of the nobler human motivations. The act of reaching into one's own pockets to help a fellow man in need is praiseworthy and laudable. Reaching into someone else's pocket is despicable and worthy of condemnation.

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