

The “Will of the People”

Craig J. Cantoni

During his recent visit to Cairo, President Obama said that he was committed “to governments that reflect the will of the people.”

There, in a nutshell, is the problem with his thinking, as well as with the thinking of his predecessor, the thinking of almost all members of Congress and the Supreme Court, the thinking of most of the nation’s intelligentsia and commentaria, and the thinking of most Americans.

What’s wrong with what he said? Imagine that in a prior life, Obama had visited the antebellum South—before blacks had become a majority of the population. Imagine that during the visit, he had complimented Southern whites for having governments that reflected the will of the people by maintaining the right of the people to own slaves.

An extreme example? Yes, but it shows that a moral government is not necessarily a government that reflects the *will of the people*. Rather, a moral government is one that protects the *rights of the individual*, especially against the transgressions of the majority.

What Obama should have said in Cairo was that he was committed to governments that protect the rights of the individual—that is, to governments that safeguard the life, liberty, speech, and property of each person. Such a government wouldn’t allow a woman to be stoned for adultery just because a majority believes that Allah commands it.

Obama didn’t speak this way because, in his view of government, the good of the individual is secondary to the will of the majority, the collective, the common good, and a charismatic leader.

Take nationalized healthcare. Obama has said that physicians are going to have to “sacrifice” to fix the problems with the “healthcare system”—problems, by the way, that have been caused by the government. What he meant was that for the common good, physicians will be forced to accept lower pay. This isn’t as draconian as the Incas’ sacrificing virgins for the common good. After all, “only” doctors’ livelihoods will be sacrificed, not their lives. But the thinking is the same.

The danger is that if physicians can be sacrificed one day, others can be sacrificed the next day. In fact, patients will be sacrificed under nationalized medicine. The underlying premise of nationalized medicine is that individuals do not own their bodies; rather, the collective does. Therefore, the collective can dictate what medical care you may receive, from whom you may receive it, and at what price.

It isn’t even necessary to trample on individual rights to fix the problems with medicine, just as it isn’t necessary to trample on individual rights to fix any social problem. To the contrary, almost all social problems have been caused by trampling on individual

rights. For example, the appalling socioeconomic problems among inner-city blacks have their genesis in slavery, followed by Jim Crow laws, redlining, and the forcible taking of money (property) from taxpayers to support a welfare system that has brought two-parent black families to near extinction and triggered severe academic problems, high dropout rates, and crime.

The use of force for reasons other than the protection of the individual never has a good outcome. Or as Ayn Rand said, “The smallest minority on earth is the individual. Those who deny individual rights cannot claim to be defenders of minorities.”

Of course Rand is demonized by the Left as a mean-spirited misanthrope, when in actuality her philosophy was rooted in a trust in mankind, not a hatred of mankind. She is demonized because she was so prophetic about where statism and anti-capitalism would lead. For example, in her book *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, published in 1967, she wrote, “At present, we lag behind Great Britain on the road to the collectivist abyss—but not very far behind.” She also wrote the following about socialized medicine in Great Britain:

The next time you hear or read reports about the success of socialized medicine in Great Britain and in the other welfare states of Europe—the reports brought by the superficial, concrete-bound mentalities who cannot see beyond the range of the moment and who declare that they observe no change in the conscientious efficiency of the family doctors—remember that the source of the family doctors’ efficiency, knowledge, and power lies in the laboratories of theoretical medicine, and that the source is drying up. *This* is the real price which a country pays for socialized medicine—a price which does not appear on the cost sheets of the state planners, but will not take long to appear in reality.

It took mankind thousands of years to develop a political, economic, and social system in which the individual wasn’t at the mercy of the mob, tribe, collective, majority, alpha male, chieftain, shaman, or monarch—or other people’s envy, superstitions, ignorance, and irrationality. The chains that kept individuals in slavery, serfdom, subservience, penury, fear, and blind obedience to some collective will and higher authority were broken by the concepts of individual liberty, property rights, free trade, the division of labor, and specialization. The result was an explosion in prosperity, creativity, innovation, longevity, and health.

The most shocking thing is not that President Obama is hurriedly reconnecting the chains of collectivism and statism. The most shocking thing is that no one is gasping in shock.

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