

Old Koskoosh and the Duty to Die

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The writer Jack London traveled extensively in Canada's Yukon Territory after gold was found in a tributary of the Klondike River in 1896, setting off one of history's greatest gold rushes. His experiences inspired a great body of work.

Written in a time of social Darwinism, his work exudes a theme of "survival of the fittest." Times were hard. It was an era when a man could be fired after getting his hand cut off in a machine for the mere reason that, without his hand, he could no longer work. Personally, London embraced socialism. But he was really a capitalist; he loved freedom, and he created value and wealth from the ethers with his pen and his mind.

In his short story "The Law of Life," London creates Koskoosh, an old man who has been abandoned by his nomadic tribe because he has become a burden. Sitting and reflecting in the snow, Koskoosh recalls, as a boy, watching an old moose succumb to a pack of wolves. As his small fire and his life fade, the old man perceives a howl and then, moments later, a ring of sidling, grey shapes and the thrust of a cold, wet muzzle.

The liberal press from Fairbanks to Yellowknife would have called members of a tribe that sheds its dead weight in order to survive "Republicans." Actually, leaving a burdensome old man in the snow affirms the socialist notion that resources belong to the tribe, ladled out and rationed by the tribal experts. That sounds like modern Democrats. The moose may seem to be a compelling parallel, but it assumes that human beings are mere beasts who, like moose, do not love one another.

In pre-war Germany, the phrase "*lebensunwertes Leben*" emerged—"life unworthy of life." Prodded by National Socialist German Workers Party experts, doctors began a program of medical killing to rid society of those who, like old Koskoosh, had become a burden. Crippled children, the mentally ill, criminals, and invalids were secretly put to death. This program of medical killing accelerated as war approached and resources dwindled, ensnaring more categories of "patients" and finally morphing into the Holocaust. Some do not like juxtaposing the Holocaust with the war on the weak, preferring to put it in its own exceptional category of evil, but the sequence of events is fact.

Several years ago, Colorado Governor Richard Lamm, while reflecting on the entitlement state, made the comment that old people have a "duty to die." His political career died, but he still lives. He got his Medicare card 13 years ago.

Lamm's intellectual successor is Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, the brain behind "ObamaCare." He once outlined a system for distributing medical resources based on patient age

and societal value, an idea apparently plagiarized from the primitive tribes of the Yukon. To summarize: Because few societal resources have been invested in babies, they are not worth much. Since old people no longer work, they are not worth much either. Those in between deserve the best care. Only the experts determine human worth. Medical resources, in the discerning mind of Dr. Emanuel, should primarily be channeled to those who can hunt caribou.

President Obama did not talk much about his namesake legislation before he was re-elected. Other than calling for a repeal, Mitt Romney did not talk about it much either. After all, it was his idea first. Had he apologized for his Massachusetts plan and explained how the American Revolution ended in the state where it began, he might now be President.

The lesson is to pay attention to the unsaid. Under the planks, the unspeakable, beating, telltale heart of the Affordable Care Act is the Independent Payment Advisory Board. The IPAB, or "death panel" to some, is empowered to set Medicare payments for medical services if costs become uncontrollable. Indeed, the goal is to put a tight lid on all medical spending, public and private. If the allowed price for a medical service is set below cost, the service will eventually disappear. In a free society, charity can thrive. But as doctors and hospitals are impoverished, resources once used for charity vanish. Moreover, socialism is actually hostile to charity and may punish those who offer it.

Under the ACA, the President is enjoined to appoint 15 bureaucrats to the IPAB, none of whom can be practicing physicians. Nominations for IPAB, which now only require the assent of 51 Senators, have not yet been made. Nominations trigger public hearings, scrutiny, and the attention of the rare journalist who is still awake. If the panel is not appointed, then IPAB will be a death panel of one: the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Samuel Adams used the press to set brushfires for liberty. Today, the press is like the dying embers of old Koskoosh's fire—not enough to keep the wolves in grey suits at bay.

We must find a way to rekindle the passion for liberty.

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