

Can Political Freedom Exist Without Virtue? America's Founders Didn't Think So.

America's Founding Fathers were a contentious lot, disagreeing about everything from the need for a Bill of Rights to the merits of skinny-dipping "[near the Bridge ... whilst ...Ladies of the first fashion in the neighbourhood, are passing over it...](#)" But they spoke unanimously on one topic: the requirement for a moral citizenry if the country were to remain politically free. Once a people abandons virtue, the Founders insisted, it plummets into tyranny.

Charles Carroll, who among other feats signed the Declaration of Independence, warned, "[Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time](#); they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime & pure, ... are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free governments."

Another signer, Richard Henry Lee, concurred: "[It is certainly true that a popular government cannot flourish without virtue in the people.](#)"

And that Founder of Founders, George Washington, advised, "[Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity](#), religion and morality are indispensable supports. ... The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to every species of free government."

Does it? Why? What so inextricably binds virtue to liberty?

The Founders were blissfully free from the modern mythology surrounding government. They knew that the State is neither benevolent nor competent. Worse, since its essence is brute, physical force, politicians and bureaucrats almost always destroy or enslave the very folks they claim to help.

Obamacare and other "entitlements" perfectly illustrate this principle. Obviously, these programs are socialist, which is

to say legalized theft. They authorize bureaucrats to rob some Americans while doling out the loot to others.

All of us, even the most progressive Progressive, denounce as criminal relieving a man of his wallet at gunpoint. Yet Americans increasingly aim government's guns at their fellows, as if neither God nor man objects to coercion from the State. We've replaced "What's yours is yours" with "Whatever I can legally take from you is mine." No matter that a huge gulf usually yawns between legality and virtue.

Everyone loves getting something for nothing—especially without the risk of imprisonment that threatens unofficial thieves. Only people of vigorous virtue admit that ransacking victims in dark alleys is morally equivalent to ransacking them via taxes. It takes even stronger virtue to decline that plunder's "benefits," whether food stamps or government contracts.

Ditto for wars of aggression and empire. These conflicts enrich political cronies while offering warriors promotion and recognition. Even American civilians enjoy vicarious, "patriotic" thrills as their team whups the bad guys. But folks with robust morals condemn as murder wars fought for any reason beyond defending the country from armed invasion. Meanwhile, rejecting the profits, lucrative jobs, and excitement that war always brings requires muscular morality. As well as an abhorrence of political slavery. The Founders appreciated that when the State is powerful enough to compel some subjects to pay other subjects' bills or to wage perpetual war, it is powerful enough to do whatever it pleases. Indeed, when it controls medicine, as it does via Obamacare, the FDA, the CDC, etc., it even decides who will live—and who won't.

This totalitarian nightmare would never plague virtuous people who scorn money extracted forcibly if legally from their neighbors. They also refuse to murder, even when politicians rename the slaughter "war" and bleat about "duty" and "honor."

And since they deny government the power to steal and kill on their behalf, the State shrinks rather than metastasizing into

a cancer that devours them.

No wonder John Adams admonished, “[I]t is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand. The only foundation of a free constitution is pure virtue.”

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