



When a People Tyrannizes Itself

All around the realm was heard a fateful cry: "Twill make us sleep the nightmare if ye tax the other guy. We can accept the yoke of poor polity, If the misery cursing all gives equality. Play one group against another, and us all you may ream, Too busy envying each other we ignore your wicked scheme. 'Tis the rhyme of the time, no matter tyranny be nigh; Twill make us sleep the nightmare if ye tax the other guy. Tax 'em high! A study was once conducted in which participants played a game involving the accumulation of money. It had an interesting finding: Those describing themselves as leftists were much more willing than others to give up a bit of their own cash if it meant taking more from somebody else. What motivated this? It's called envy, and we used to call such people immoral. Now we call them "liberals."



Whatever you call them, they're calling for new taxes and getting their way right and left — or should I say left and more left? A good example is the Obama administration's new 10 percent tax on tanning salons, which is supposed to help fund its health-care scheme.

Applying a little sauce to the gander, some have mentioned that this is a "white-people tax." After all, given that 98 percent of those frequenting tanning salons are white, you won't see too many Black Panther members patronize such establishments — they catch their sun in front of polling places. But, anyway, could you imagine the uproar if there were a targeted tax on any product used almost exclusively by black Americans?

This tanning-salon measure is, according to some, just another sin tax. For example, peruse the comments under [this](#) *Washington Post* piece on the tax and you'll find sentiments such as the one from "sanjukta," who wrote, "Don't feel any sympathy for these people or against this tax. Tanning is stupid." Ah, statisticians wish to convince us we should tax away stupidity, and they certainly succeed in making us wish we could.

The poster's attitude is a reminder of how — despite Afghanistan fantasies about democracy as panacea — a people can tyrannize itself. How it works is simple: Just demonize a target behavior enough, and some majority will rally for it to be banned or taxed. And it works on most anything, no matter how innocuous or beneficial. Why, Scandinavian feminists — a particularly ferocious sub-species — asserted that the male practice of standing up while urinating was symbolic of male dominance (inferior, apparently, to dunderhead dominance) and actually succeeded in getting urinals removed from a Swedish elementary school.

What people forget when going down this road is that what goes around, comes around. Sure, your ox



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may not be gored by, let's say, tobacco taxes; you don't smoke. But remember that most any behavior or activity — tanning, fishing, dodgeball, hunting, etc. — is only practiced by a minority of the population. Thus, make the rounds demonizing behaviors, and you can eliminate freedom after freedom simply by rallying a different majority in each case. Don't worry, people won't think about the big picture — they'll live in the moment and say "Tax the other guy." And when all is said and done, the *majority* will find it has few freedoms left.

This is why we should realize that the sin-tax argument is a con (at least the Islamists outlaw what they consider sin, as opposed to using it to make money in the name of the public good). Not only do relativistic leftists — who are sin taxes' greatest proponents — not believe in sin, their cult of the body invents new "sins" almost as fast as their cult of the brain invents new psychological disorders (oddly, though, Compulsive Taxation Disorder — CTD? — hasn't been identified yet). But how much of what we have do we really "need" and how much is good for us? People don't need to go hang-gliding, rock-climbing or sky-diving, risky activities all. And who needs a sports car? I mean, a powerful vehicle with cat-like cornering provides great temptation to race about, which is why insurance companies charge higher rates for such cars. How about pleasure boats? They damage the environment through their emissions, through accidental oil discharge and when propellers slice up marine life. As for food, how much is left on the menu if we remove what's bad for us and what we don't need? It would make a Spartan boy's [diet](#) look good.

If we wish to remain a free people, we cannot run desires through an ever-less-porous paternalistic state filter and see what comes out the other end. As G.K. Chesterton said in 1935, "The free man owns himself. He can damage himself with either eating or drinking; he can ruin himself with gambling. If he does he is certainly a damn fool, and he might possibly be a damned soul; but if he may not, he is not a free man any more than a dog." Freedom cannot be based on needs — especially since the government doesn't really know what real needs are, anyway. Heck, I need a cigarette more than I need most of our politicians. And I don't even smoke.

When pondering this tyranny-of-the-majority phenomenon, perhaps it becomes clear why James Madison wrote in *The Federalist*, No. 10, "democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths."

I will add that there is a harbinger of that death: When the body politic starts to take on the character of a covetous, grasping tyrant. And, sadly, this is more the norm than the exception. It is why democracy is sometimes just millions of people making the bad decisions slowly and inefficiently that a dictator could make with the stroke of a pen.

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