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From Free Enterprise to Protecting the Life of a Penguin

Penguins gather to share their body heat during the frigid winters on Antarctica. After they bundle together they constantly change positions to allow the ones freezing on the outer edge of the pack to enter into its inner warmth. This is how they survive temperatures colder than -40º F.

When the weather warms, the female penguin lays an egg. The male penguin and the female penguin then take turns protecting the egg from the cold while the other penguin walks to the sea to dive in and fish for food.

There are two ways to explain how the penguins have come by this method of survival. One is their caring for the lives of their fellow penguins. This kind of behavior seems evident with other animals, such as by a farmer's claim to have witnessed a hen's sacrifice of its life when it ran back and covered its chick while a hawk swooped down for its prey.

Another explanation for the penguins' behavior is that it is determined by the conditions of nature. When the temperature drops to -40º F, penguins are attracted to the heat radiating from each other's body. Because the ones trapped in the middle become too warm, they seek relief at the outside edge of the group. Moreover, since an adequate population is needed to trap enough heat to survive the winter, they have reason to reproduce. They therefore cooperate with each other to compete against nature.

However it manifests in nature, and for whatever reason, altruism does exist. At the cost of more than one-hundred million dollars, for instance, a group of scientists were given the opportunity to develop prosthetic limbs that enable people with lost arms to pick a grape off a vine without squeezing it. The scientists were not driven by competition against each other. They simply wanted to accomplish what they were asked to do, which was to create better conditions for their fellow humans for them to be able to live more comfortable lives. Even though the funding for the project was directed to benefit soldiers injured on the battle field, the distress of fellow humans was no doubt motivation enough for

the scientists to succeed beyond expectation in their mission. They thus cooperated with each other for humanity's sake.

Examples of altruism are plentiful in society. A lady on the street, for instance, suffers from Huntington's disease. Her parents have passed on, but she is looked after by those of us who care about the plights of our fellow humans. When she staggers and falls on the sidewalk, a caring bystander calls for an ambulance. She is taken to the hospital emergency facility, examined and released. The bill for the procedure is charged to Medicaid, not because she paid for the insurance, but because of the generosity of the system put forth by our elected leaders to ensure that those of us who are unable to afford the cost of the coverage are still taken care of.

There is a cost to be paid by us for someone else's generosity. The doctor spends time to care for the patient. The hospital bills Medicaid. The cost of medical insurance inflates. It becomes unaffordable to the working class. When home owners become ill and become burdened with too much medical expense, they get behind on their mortgage payments and become bankrupt.

Elected officials attempt to change the system, as to make it more affordable and fair for all, but public funding requires a tax, and a tax reduces our freedom to spend our money on what we care to purchase. Indeed, we prefer to live our lives the way we want to instead of having others mandate it for us.

Freedom of choice is a fundamental principle of the free enterprise system. By it, supply and demand economics is driven by way of competition.

Supply represents real economic wealth. All the gold in Fort Knox is worthless without anything for it to purchase. However, the value of supply is also dependent on demand, which becomes the accumulative choices of each individual. If Bill Gates is willing to pay two billion dollars for a moon rock and someone can afford an expedition to the moon and back for whatever reason, then a moon rock will be worth two billion dollars. A rare rock that does nothing to sustain life is thus worth more than all the food I can eat during my lifetime.

In contrast, an abundance of supply decreases competition for it and therefore decreases it economic value. The air we breathe has no economic value. A basketball player paid six million dollars a season has economic value. A high school basketball team has no economic value if the price of admission to watch it play a game is free, even though we pay property taxes to sponsor the social event.

High school sports must have value to the community if the majority of the people in it prefer to have the events sponsored. However, public service with taxation and a mandate without full support of the people restricts freedom of choice and becomes controversial, even with the noblest of intentions. Suppose, for instance, a street with no sidewalks is unsafe for pedestrians. Drivers sometimes choose to surpass the speed limit such that they endanger the lives of children that use the street. City officials decide sidewalks are required to remedy the situation. Each homeowner is then forced to pay the cost of adding sidewalk to their property. Freedom of choice is thus sacrificed for the good of

the community at large. Still, however, some property owners care less about the safety of children and more about whatever else they could buy without having to pay for the addition of sidewalks.

Public decisions are not without consequences to those who make them. If the majority of the people favor the addition of sidewalks and the like, then they are more likely to reelect public officials to office.

Decisions on Antarctica are also not without consequence. Penguins either corporate with each other or perish, whereas such general threats to our overall existence are less evident. We thus favor individualism. Rather than reforming healthcare to be more affordable to all of us, we prefer the personal way of offering our generosity from one person to the other.

Economic wealth is much the same way. The overgrazing of cattle by a rancher, for instance, could result in fertile soil turned into wasteland. The potential wealth of society is thus decreased. However, the rancher is sometimes concerned less with the future wealth of our grandchildren and more with the immediate concerns of his own wealth, which is earned by providing beef on the table for all of us who want it there.

The air we breathe is free. We can choose to pollute it with smoke in our lungs from cigarettes. We can allow industry to pollute the air we breathe. Industry provides jobs and material wealth. Polluted air and health problems require cleanup and more doctors, and it therefore provides more jobs as well.

How are we then to pay for cleaner air? Is not taxation more often than not unwanted socialism?

Penguins cooperate with each other in their individual efforts for preservation, whereas free enterprise is about competition among individuals. There is no controversy about the cooperative needs of the penguins, but there is competition among us members of the free enterprise system.

But capitalists with capital to invest are more equipped to outperform their competitors. They thus rely on banks to lend them money. If they invest it wisely, they succeed such that they, the banks and society in general benefit from it. However, if they invest unwisely, then credit tightens, opportunities for production are lost, unemployment increases, and the system suffers during a lengthy time of adjustment.

Decisions therefore affect our welfare whether they are individual decisions or decisions by government. As for the decisions of bankers to lend capital unwisely, the backlash from a tightening of credit can result in less opportunity for production, increased unemployment, less spending, deflation in the prices of goods along with more inability to pay off credit, and a frozen economy. As for the decision process of government, to fund a bridge to nowhere could put money in some people’s pockets at the expense of the workload of other individuals. Transparency of the decision process is thus imperative to the outcome.

Government could intervene to speed up the recovery time of the economy from a collapse by way of individual decisions, but the decisions of government become controversial inasmuch as they replace the freedom of individual choice. Government could, however, still make wise decisions that favor the opportunity for

individual growth, as by investing in civic needs that provide jobs and increase the public wealth of society, especially during times of recession.

There is no controversy in the penguins' attitudes for public cooperation. It is according to their obvious needs for survival. In contrast, financial crises are only a hardship. When there is no substantial loss of goods there is only a discrepancy on how to go about producing and distributing wealth in a fair manner. The system is able to recover from recession, or even from depression. However, if the economic crisis is caused either by a severe drought from climate change or by an attack by a foreign invader, this means real wealth is lost. The conditions of survival are then more akin to those of the penguins.

Without enough food to go around, food stamps become worthless. Social security is lost to the inflation of prices. People cunning enough to deceive and steal are more likely to survive the elements. Crime is likely to increase; law enforcement could decrease, as to favor a libertarian society.

There is another approach to the crises to consider as well. If people choose security over freedom, as they are often inclined to do, then they are likely to bond together for a common objective of utmost importance, as to overcome hazardous conditions with new technology,

In retrospect: On the one hand, money is not real wealth. It is only a convenient way to distribute real wealth, but the father must pay the rent or the mortgage. He must have enough money to put food on the table, send his kids to school, and so forth. To him, money does represent real wealth.

On the other hand, the individual does not conceive of the freedom that roads allow vehicles to drive wherever, as to fill stores with products and provide a way to receive services. The individual does not conceive that only goods and services are real wealth and that prices can adjust to the average amount of currency each individual has to personally spend in the private sector of the economy. The individual does not conceive how government can reduce unemployment by putting people to work on worthwhile projects that will create a better environment with renewable sources of energy. To the individual, taxation is socialism that will leave our grandchildren in debt. However, a crumbled infrastructure is what will actually leave our grandchildren in real debt, as they will be left with the task of fixing it.

We individuals have one up on the penguins. If the penguins are unable to adjust to climate change, as is indicated by studies of declining population with long periods of warmer temperature, they are doomed to perish along with global warming. However, if we are finally able to recognize such threats before us, as to come together with one common purpose in mind, which likely includes the plight of the penguins as well, then maybe we can do something about it.